

Studies in the Scriptures

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JANUARY

ENJOYING GOD'S BEST

The above title embodies and expresses our “New Year’s Wish” for our readers, that such may be the experience of each of them during 1946. In employing such language, perhaps it needs to be pointed out that we are not here accommodating one of the modern sayings of worldlings when they wish their friends, “All the best.” No, indeed, we trust the time will never come when we adopt the slang of the street in these pages. Years before we ever heard that saying of the world’s, we were accustomed to wish our friends “God’s best.” Surely, it should be the earnest longing of every Christian to enter into and enjoy God’s best for him, and to diligently guard against everything which would hinder the same. But since the expression is probably new to some of our readers, let us explain what we signify by it. We mean God’s best for the soul *and* for the body: In spiritual things and in temporal. We mean a personal experience of God’s approbation, a real enjoying of His favour in grace, in providence, and in nature.

By enjoying God’s best, we mean for the saint to have daily communion with Him, to walk in the light of His countenance, to have that “peace...which passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7) garrisoning his heart and mind. To enjoy God’s best is for an ungrieved Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, making them real and precious to the soul. It is for His Word to be sweet unto our taste, light unto our understanding, strength to the inner man. It is for prayer to be a delight, for answers of peace to be received without intermission, for the channel of blessing to remain unchoked, open. It is to have the mind stayed upon Him, to have a conscience void of offence, to have full assurance of our acceptance in Christ. It is to be the recipients of real and sweet foretastes of the everlasting bliss, awaiting the redeemed on High. It is for our graces to be kept healthy and vigorous, so that faith, hope, love, meekness, patience, and zeal are in daily exercise. *That* is what we long for ourselves and covet for our Christian friends.

The enjoyment of God’s best is not limited to the reception of His special favours in our spiritual lives, but includes, as well, His particular interpositions on our temporal behalf. We have reference now not to the general course of His providence—though if that be *against* us, we have good reason to fear we have *missed* His best, for many of the wicked prosper for a season, both in their bodies and estates. No, we have in mind His unmistakable and signal interventions on our behalf, in a day when His judgments are abroad, or in situations where the use of means brings us to the end of our own resources, when He makes good those promises: “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee...There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling” (Psa 91:7, 10). So that when an epidemic strikes a community, we are spared; when falling bombs are destroying neighbours’ houses, ours is untouched.

But is such a thing possible in this life? Absolutely so, no; relatively, yes. Uninterruptedly so, perhaps not; generally so, without a doubt, yes. Not a few of God’s people experience the reality of it for themselves. But the mere wishing for, and desiring after, will not bring it to pass. More than that is needed: There are certain requirements we have to meet, specified conditions to be fulfilled. Take the promises cited above: To whom are they specifically addressed? Not unto the whole family of God in general, but to a particular character—namely, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High” (Psa 91:1), the one who can truthfully say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (Psa 91:2). To make this doubly plain, the Psalmist went on to say, “*Because* thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, *thy* habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh *thy* dwelling” (Psa 91:9-10). “Because”—for that very reason!

Perhaps the writer will be pardoned if he relates here a personal experience by way of illustration. Some fifteen years ago, a number of cases of small-pox caused quite a scare in the country, and the authorities were urging people to be vaccinated. My wife and I counted upon the Lord to preserve us from infection and declined any medical attention, as we have done since then. But then a more severe trial confronted us. I had received what I felt was a clear and pressing call from my Master to pull up our tent and journey to a distant land. The newspapers repeatedly emphasized the fact that none would be granted a passport at any consulate, unless they had been recently vaccinated.

ed. We spread our case before God and begged Him to undertake for us. And He did: Not only did He preserve us from the disease, but after a full examination by the medical officer, passports were given us and not a question was raised about vaccination! God honoured our simple faith in Him, as He has in many other instances since then.

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2Ch 16:9). *That* is what we understand by the enjoying of God’s best: To have God showing Himself strong in our behalf. But that is *conditioned* upon having a heart “perfect toward him.” A “perfect” heart does not mean a sinless one, for there is none such among the fallen sons of men; rather does it denote a sincere or upright one, one that beats true to Him. Yet that definition is scarcely sufficient. In relation to God Himself, a “perfect” heart is one which loves and reveres Him, which trusts and confides in Him, which has filial fear of Him, which honestly and resolutely seeks to please Him in all things. In relation to sin, a “perfect” heart is one which hates and resists all evil, which mourns over every inward working of it, which penitently confesses each yielding to it. It is not that which is perfect in itself, but which is perfect “toward the Lord,” on whose behalf He intervenes, puts forth His might, and delivers from situations from which we could not extricate ourselves.

“No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Psa 84:11). Observe well, this promise is made to those whose *walk* becometh saints, whose faces are turned Godwards: Unto such, no good thing is withheld. *That* is enjoying God’s best. To be regular recipients not only of His common mercies, but of His special favours: Enjoying the smile of His approval. To be blest with serenity of mind, a heart that rejoices in the Lord, our every need supplied: To have His *blessing* upon our lives in *all* their varied aspects and relations.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

25. Ephesians 3:14-21

Let the reader turn first to our present portion and note its contents. Is he not at once struck with the radical and immense difference there is between that prayer, and those he is accustomed to hear in public—and we may add, the tenour—of his own in private? Is it either useless or impertinent to inquire *why* this be the case? Must there not be a reason, some definite cause, why the petitions of most Christians today are so very different from those breathings of the apostle’s? Undoubtedly, there must be. And is the explanation far to seek? Must it not be because so many of God’s people are now living upon a much lower plane of spiritual experience? Surely, that cannot be gainsaid. And why is it that they dwell so much in the valleys, and so little on the mountains? Is it not because they have failed to apprehend the wonderful portion which is theirs in Christ, because they do not grasp and enjoy the inestimable privileges which are already theirs, because they possess not their possessions, because they are regulated so much by their frames and feelings, instead of living by faith on the One who loved and gave Himself for them? True, in varying degrees of all of us.

It has been rightly pointed out that, “The tenour and subject of our prayers will be in accord with our knowledge and apprehension of God, and of the relation in which we recognise Him as standing toward us and us to Him.” That statement expresses a most important and practical truth; and yet, one that is understood by very few today. Let us illustrate. If our concept of God be virtually restricted to Him as our Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge, and we rarely view Him, or address Him in any other character than “the most High,” then, while our hearts may be awed and our souls humbled before Him, yet there is likely to be very little freedom of approach or joy of heart in our communion with Him, and our requests from Him will be regulated accordingly. Or, if we regard Him as having given us only the *hope* of obtaining salvation by Jesus Christ, then naturally and necessarily, our constant desire before him will be for the strengthening and brightening of that hope—for that is what we shall feel is the one thing most needed for the comfort of our hearts and the peace of our minds. As to any further revelation, which God may have given of the purpose of His grace unto His people, we can feel but little interest therein.

So long as we entertain *a doubt* of our being personally concerned and having a portion therein, the riches of divine grace can have no power upon our hearts. On the other hand, if the Christian realises that the first person in the blessed Trinity sustains to him precisely the same relation as He did, and does unto Christ—namely, his cove-

nant God and personal Father—and if, in the undoubting simplicity of faith, he takes his stand upon the sure foundation which God has laid for *every* believing sinner in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation of His dear Son, then his desires will naturally and necessarily go forth after a fuller knowledge of what is the purpose of God, in connection with the manifestation of the glory of Him, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance” (Eph 1:11). And thus, it is in the prayer, we are about to ponder: It is made unto the Father, with request that, by the strengthening operation of the Spirit and the dwelling of Christ in their hearts by faith, the saints may know the “mystery” (previously described), learn by deeper experience, the unsearchable love of Christ, and so be filled with all the fulness of God. O that our souls may be so quickened that these petitions will become our own breathings.

It will help us not a little unto an understanding, both of the scope of this prayer and the meaning of its petitions, if we duly observe *the place* which it occupies in this epistle—namely, at the close of the doctrinal section and as introductory to the practical portion—for it is a turning into supplication the contents of the former, and a preparation of heart for obedience unto the precepts of the latter. When doctrine be rightly apprehended, it exerts a powerful effect upon the heart and influences our devotional life. Likewise, when both the affections and the conscience are stirred by the exhortations God addresses to His people, they are brought to their knees before Him seeking grace. It is those two features or elements which throw light upon our present passage. An analysis of the prayer itself indicates the following general divisions. First, the *occasion* of it, as indicated by, “For this cause I bow my knees” (Eph 3:14). Second, its *Object*, namely, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:14-15). Third, its *appeal*: “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory” (Eph 3:16). Fourth, its *petitions*, which are four in number (Eph 3:16-19). Fifth, its *doxology* (Eph 3:20-21). We shall use those divisions for our outline, and turn now to consider.

First, *the occasion* of this prayer: “For this cause I bow my knees” (Eph 3:14). In those words, the apostle tells us what it was that moved him to so address the throne of grace on this occasion, for the obvious meaning of them is, “On this account, for this reason, I now approach the mercy-seat.” We must therefore seek an answer to the inquiry, “For *what* case?” This requires us to examine the context and note the contents of the preceding verses. The attentive reader will observe that the same clause is also found at the beginning of the chapter: “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph 3:1). Scholars have pointed out that there is no verb there of which, “I Paul” is the nominative; and hence, there has been considerable diversity of opinion as to the probable construction of the passage, though the most natural one seems to be that the sentence begun in verse 1 is recommenced and completed in verse 14. That is the view taken by the best of the commentators, and which we personally adopt. Thus, what the apostle intended to say at the beginning of the chapter—but was interrupted by the flowing of other thoughts into his mind—he now says in verse 14.

“For this cause, I Paul...” (Eph 3:1)—namely, in view of the wondrous and blessed truth which has engaged his pen throughout chapter 2—“...bow my knees unto the Father” (Eph 3:14). But he was interrupted from immediately doing so, for as soon as he added, “I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph 3:1), the realisation of his “bonds” awakened a fresh train of ideas, which—as a digression—he expanded to the end of verse 13. Consequently, the “for this cause” of Ephesians 3:14 has a *double* reference: Immediately to the divine revelation made in verses 2-13, which chiefly concerns an unfolding of “the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4)—that is, of the *mystical* Christ, the spiritual Body of which He is the Head; that Body in which the elect of God from the Hebrews and from the Gentiles have been made fellow-members, fellow-heirs, and fellow-partakers of God’s promise in Christ by the Gospel. More remotely, the “for this cause” of Ephesians 3:14 looks back to Ephesians 3:1 and makes known the breathings of Paul’s soul as evoked by what had occupied his mind throughout chapter 2, where he had expounded the grand doctrine of regeneration and reconciliation—the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, and of both unto God.

“For this cause.” Combining the double reference in Ephesians 3:1 and 14, and what each looks back to, we understand it thus: Since the saints have been divinely quickened, reconciled to God, made members of the mystical body of Christ, I long to have them living and acting as becometh those so highly favoured of God and made partakers of such inestimable privileges; and therefore, I supplicate God on their behalf unto that end. It is both interesting and instructive to closely compare this prayer with that found at the close of chapter 1: The principal difference between them is not to be accounted for so much by the different aspects of truth presented in Ephesians 1 and 2, as it is by the different effects which the apostle desired might be wrought in those to whom he wrote. There are indeed different branches of doctrine unfolded in those two chapters—and undoubtedly, that difference determined the keynote in each of the prayers—yet, that is neither the sole, nor main, reason which explains their varied tones. The variation in the petitions of those respective prayers expressed the particular quickenings they needed in order to respond suitably unto the glorious revelations he had set before them.

In Ephesians 1, we have a wonderful opening up of the eternal purpose of God's sovereign grace concerning His elect, of those spiritual blessings with which He has blessed them in the heavenlies in Christ, having chosen them, accepted them, and given them an inheritance in the Beloved. So transcendent and amazing are those riches of the divine grace, so entirely different from anything which man had conceived, the apostle makes request that the Father would vouchsafe "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph 1:17), so that with eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we might *know*, etc. It is of great importance, and also his privilege, that the saint should apprehend that it is the sovereign grace of God, which has brought him into the place of unchanging blessing in Christ, for he has been made "the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21). This is the first thing that the converted soul needs to learn: That he has been reconciled to God by the blood of the cross; and thereby, established in peace with Him for evermore; that he has been justified once and for all by the obedience of Christ; that he has been perfected forever and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. There can be no lasting peace within, no growth in grace, no loving and grateful obedience, until that be laid hold of by an intelligent faith.

But essential as it is for the believer to recognise the perfect standing which is his in Christ before the throne of God, it is no less necessary for the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and his own good that he should be exercised in his soul; that his affections should be set upon Christ; that he should be more and more conformed to His image, both experimentally and practically; that he should "grow up into him in all things" (Eph 4:15). Accordingly, while in Ephesians 1, the apostle had unfolded what God hath purposed for us and prays that we may know the same, in Ephesians 2, he treats more of what God has wrought in the saints—and therefore, prays to Him to work in them that which will suitably answer unto the same! Thus, while we are to hold fast in our minds the perfect and unchanging *standing* which is ours in Christ, yet we need also to be deeply concerned about our *state*: About health being maintained in our souls, about Christ having His proper place in our hearts, about the whole household of faith being cherished in our affections, about being filled with all the fulness of God.

Thus, the prayer of Ephesians 3 is supplementary, or rather, complementary, to the one at the close of chapter 1; and as might be expected, the two together present a perfect balance between the principal aspects of the Christian's life: The objective, and the subjective—that is, faith being occupied with the riches of God's grace outside himself, and love being concerned with what is going on within himself. That wondrous portion which he has in Christ allows of no change, for it is perfect and entire; but that which has been wrought within him, needs perfecting unto the day of redemption. His justification can never be more complete than it was the moment he first believed, but he may and should, obtain a better understanding of it. Hence, in Ephesians 3, the apostle prays not merely that the saints should know what divine grace had wrought for and given to them, but what God would now work by His Spirit in them. The first petition is that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16)—that is, renewed by Him day by day. And what would be the evidence of that? This: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17)—our hearts fixed on Him as their Object, their supreme Attraction. But we must not anticipate too much what is yet (D.V.) to come before us.

Second, its *Object*. The One whom Paul addressed is here styled, "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). God is *our* "Father" first as He is the Author of our beings—and in this sense, we are His "offspring" (Act 17:28); and second, as we are formed after His natural image: God is spirit (Joh 4:24), and therefore, "Father of spirits" (Heb 12:9). In both those senses, God is the Father of angels, and therefore, they are designated "the sons of God" (Job 1:6; 38:7). But third, in a higher sense, He is our Father spiritually, having by regeneration made us partakers of His nature or moral likeness (Jam 1:18; 2Pe 1:4). He is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14) as the God-man Mediator, by covenant relation, and was owned by Him as such all through His life (Luk 2:49; Joh 5:17, 20:17). It is because God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He is our Father in the spiritual and highest sense of the term, as John 20:17 intimates. All mercies flow to us through Christ from the Father; and all our petitions ascend through Christ to the Father. It is because God is the Father of the Redeemer that He is the Father of the redeemed; and therefore, we have accesses to Him by faith in prayer. Thus, it is the relation which God sustains to the Lord Jesus as His Father, which is made the ground of the apostle's appeal: Blessed truth for us to lay hold of.

The attentive reader will note the change of address of this prayer of the apostle. In chapter 1, he approached Him as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:17), which still more distinctly views Him in the covenant relationship in which He stands both to Christ and to us. That is the foundation of His being "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14) and "our Father" (note the order in John 20:17), as it is the ground on which we have access to Him. "We can approach Him in no other character than as the God who sent the Lord Jesus to be our propitiation and Mediator. It is, therefore, by faith, as reconciled, that we address Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). Thus, we see again how the doctrinal contents of those chapters give tone to

the details of their respective prayers. It is not in Ephesians 1, but in Ephesians 2 that the fact of God's reconciliation to us is brought out; and therefore, it is in the prayer which follows that doctrinal revelation that He is addressed as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as the wonders of God's handiwork in creation are made more apparent under the microscope, so the more closely we examine the Word, are its perfections revealed in every detail. That Word which He has magnified above all His name will not only bear the most minute examination, but only as we so examine it shall we perceive its excellence in every jot and tittle (Mat 5:18).

Our appreciation of the titles by which God is addressed (and described) will be determined by the measure of our apprehension of the doctrinal expositions which occasioned those prayers. In chapter 1, the apostle had desired for the saints of both light and knowledge that, as the conscious objects of Almighty power and grace, they might understand the nature, reality, and blessedness of their calling. But now he requests for them an enlarged ability to taste with a fuller and more sensible perception of its blessedness the *communion* of that love, which had been so unreservedly lavished upon them in making them participants of the unsearchable riches of Christ. God, in the majesty of His government, is fully glorified to the eye of faith as the just Awarder of all honour in the exaltation of Christ. His will, His wisdom, and His power has each its own exemplification in giving to the Lord Jesus the seat of pre-eminence. But the One who thus magnified the Mediator is also the Father of His beloved Son; and in Him, too, of those whom He is not ashamed to own as "brethren" (Heb 2:11)—and that is what regulated the apostle in his choice of this particular address here.

It was with a particular regard unto the foregoing doctrine in chapter 2 that Paul now addressed God as "Father." Note carefully how our special relation unto Him who begat us is there brought out. We are spoken of as "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" by Himself (Eph 2:10). We are viewed as reconciled unto Him (Eph 2:16). It is declared that "we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). We are spoken of as "the household of God" (Eph 2:19); yea, as a "habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph 2:22). The same blessed fact also gave colour to the particular requests, which the apostle here made. Without too much anticipating what we hope to be occupied with in the articles immediately to follow, it will be seen that that which occupies the central place in the petitionary part of this prayer is our apprehension of the surpassing love of Christ. This request for an increased enjoyment of divine *love* is most suitably made to the *Father*, as that is the believer's privilege by virtue of his filial relationship—even as the hope of glory is his righteous expectation as a justified heir of salvation (Rom 5:1-2).

"Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:15). Concerning the precise meaning of that clause, there is perhaps room for difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of its terms. First, as to the antecedent of the "of whom," whether it be "the Father" or "our Lord Jesus Christ." Grammatically, the antecedent is a double one; but personally, we prefer to take the *nearest* and understand it of the latter. Second, as to what is "the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:15). Most, though not all, of the commentators restrict it unto the Household of faith: Those who have finished their earthly pilgrimage, and those who are still left in this scene. But in view of Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 12:22-23, we would not so limit its scope, but rather understand by "the whole family" the entire company of the redeemed, plus the holy angels. Third, the word "named": It does not mean that all are *called* by the same name, that the designation "Christian" is given to angels; but as one writer says, "the expression is taken from the custom in a family, where all bear the same name as the head of the family." All God's elect among angels and men are gathered together under one Head and constitute one community.

Perhaps the following explanation will make clearer to the reader what has just been pointed out. "Our English word 'family' takes its derivation from the lowest in the household—*famulus*—the servant or slave. The Latin *familia* was sometimes used of the household of servants and sometimes of all the members of a family under the power of a *pater familias*. But the idea of 'patria' is Hebrew, a group or class of families all claiming descent from one pater (father)—e.g. the twelve tribes of Israel. 'Joseph...was of the house and lineage ('family': Greek 'patria') of David' (Luk 2:4). The word occurs only in Luke 2:4, Acts 3:25, Ephesians 3:15, and denotes a clan of all descended from a common stock" (from "the Companion Bible," Vol. 6, page 1771). And thus, the word was well suited to express that community which is headed up in Christ.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

5. The Great Commission, Part 2 (1:1-9)

It is scarcely possible to overstate the importance of the book of Joshua. Its contents are an intrinsic part of “the children’s bread,” which is essential to their well-being. It is of incalculable value to us, both doctrinally and practically. Doctrinally, it casts clear light on a subject which has deeply exercised the best theologians throughout the centuries—namely, the relation which the Gospel sustains to the Law; yet, so far as we are aware, none has ever appealed to this portion of the Word as providing a solution to that problem. Surely, it is clear that if we can ascertain what was the precise relations which Joshua bore to Moses, we shall discover the relations which the Gospel sustains to the Law. It has indeed been recognised by many that the relation of those men unto each other indicated, in a general way, one of the chief distinctions between the Law and the Gospel: That as Joshua—rather than Moses—was the one who led Israel into Canaan, so it is the merits of Christ—and not the works of the Law—to which the sinner must look for his justification. But there, they stopped. Instead of starting at the beginning and tracing through the subject, they began in the middle and drew a single conclusion.

The very first thing told us about Joshua in the book which bears his name is that he was “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1)—a statement that looks back to Exodus 24:13. Thus, Joshua is not set before us as antagonistic to Moses, but as his attendant and supporter. Apply that to the antitype, and it should at once be evident that it is a serious mistake to regard the Gospel and the Law as being mutual enemies. Perhaps some will object, but is it not derogatory to the Son of God to view Him as subservient to the Law? Our reply is, “What saith the Scriptures?” Upon that point, there is no room for uncertainty: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal 4:4). It was in order to prevent any mistake upon this point, to allay any fears they might entertain about it, that Christ said to His disciples, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Mat 5:17)—to “fulfil” it by rendering thereto a perfect obedience—and then to endure, on behalf of His sinful people, its unremitting penalty.

But second, it is quite clear from the book of Deuteronomy that the mission of Joshua was to *complement* that of Moses, to bring to a successful issue what he began. Moses had led Israel out of Egypt, and he had been their leader all through the wilderness journeyings, but it was left unto Joshua to induct Israel into their promised inheritance. Here, too, we find no antagonism between Joshua and Moses, but rather the one augmenting the other. Therein, we have a blessed and striking adumbration of the relation which the Gospel sustains to the Law: It is not its adversary, but its handmaid; not its destroyer, but its fulfiller. Christ has not only honoured and magnified in the affections and lives of His redeemed: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Joh 1:17). “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

Under Moses, the Law obtained not its due, because of the weakness of the flesh in those who received it. They declared unto Moses, “speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it” (Deu 5:27). Nor was the Lord displeased at such an avowal. So far was He from condemning them for a presumptuous boast, we are told, “the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have *well said* all that they have spoken” (Deu 5:28). Nevertheless, there *was* a “weakness” of which they were ignorant—but of which He was cognizant—for He went on to say, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deu 5:29). There we learn what their “weakness” consisted of: They *lacked a heart* for the Lord Himself. That is the lack of the natural man the world over. Until he is born again, no man has either any filial fear of God, nor love for Him—and where those be absent, there is neither desire, nor sincere effort to keep them.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Inexpressibly solemn are those words: True of writer and reader alike, until a miracle of grace was wrought within him. The carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God, nor is it capable of being so. It is utterly *lawless*, determined only on pleasing self and having its own way. The reason for this insubjection of the carnal mind to the divine Law is that it is “enmity against God”: It is alienated from Him, it hates Him—abhorring His ineffable holiness, and despising His sovereign authority. But at regeneration, the love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 5:5). A contrary principle is implanted which opposes that enmity, and its reigning power is

destroyed. Hence, there is on the part of the regenerated person, a radically changed disposition and attitude to the divine Law, so that he declares, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:...with the mind I myself serve the law of God” (Rom 7:22, 25).

Third, not only was Joshua originally “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1), not only did he supplement his ministry and bring his mission to successful completion, but when commissioned by Jehovah to conduct His people into Canaan, he was bidden, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Jos 1:7-8). Here again, we see that so far from the work assigned, Joshua being inimical to that of his predecessor, he was enjoined to honour and magnify it. That commission concerned not so much Joshua personally, as it did the people entrusted to his charge. If Israel were to “possess their possessions” (Oba 1:17), then under the leadership of Joshua, they must regulate their conduct by the divine Law. God has not regenerated those for whom Christ died that they might live as they please, but that they “might *serve him* without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74-75).

Herein lies the triumph and glory of the Gospel: Not merely that transgressors are pardoned and sinners delivered from the wrath to come, but that they are “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24), given a nature which delights in the Law, and sincerely serves it. The Law is written on their hearts (Heb 8:10), enshrined in their affections; and under the leadership of the antitypical Joshua, their conduct is governed by it. Christ has left them an example that they should follow His steps (1Pe 2:21), and *He* respected, honoured, and fulfilled the Law. True, they do not *perfectly* obey the Law—though they long to and honestly endeavour so to do—and where there is that honest endeavour, God accepts the will for the deed. So far from the Law’s being set aside, New Testament saints are “under the law to Christ” (1Co 9:21); and just so far as they act in accordance with that fact is “good success” theirs, in the spiritual life (Jos 1:8).

Here, then, is the relation between the Law and the Gospel. First, as Moses preceded Joshua, so God employs the Law and an instrument for convicting the sinner of his need of Christ, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Second, as Joshua was “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1), so Christ was made under the Law and satisfied its every requirement—both preceptive and penal—that a perfect righteousness might be provided for His people. Third, as the mission of Joshua supplemented and complemented that of Moses, so when the Gospel of Christ is made the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, there is a communicating to that soul a nature which loves the Law and is subject to it. Fourth, as the success of Israel in Canaan turned upon their obedience to Joshua—who was to be regulated wholly by the Law of Moses—so the Christian enters into possession of his possessions only so far as he is subject to the Law in the hands of the Mediator. This will be made increasingly evident if we are permitted to continue our meditations upon this book of Scripture.

In our last, we dwelt a little on Joshua 1:1-3. With verse 4, it should be compared to Genesis 15:18, Exodus 23:31, Numbers 34:3-12, and Deuteronomy 11:24. Turning now to verse 5, we have the blessed promises, which the Lord made unto Joshua as the basis of the great commission he then received. “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). In seeking to ponder them in the light of what immediately follows, we need to bear in mind that the terms of the commission were made with Joshua not simply as a private person, but *as leader* of the Nation; that what God required from him, He required from them; and that what He promised him, He promised them. We saw this when looking at verse 2, wherein Jehovah said unto Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, *and* all this people” (Jos 1:2). That “therefore” is most significant and suggestive: So far from the loss of their former leader inclining them to sit down in dejection and despair, it was all the more necessary why they should go forward under their new commander.

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee” (Jos 1:5). That this promise was made unto the Nation as here represented by Joshua is clear from a comparison with Deuteronomy 7:24. There we find Moses addressing the whole congregation, assuring it of what the Lord God would do for them when He brought them into the land (see verse 1): “And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee” (Deu 7:24). Thus, as Joshua 1:2 gave the divine call of duty unto Israel—“arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them”—so in verse 5, we see the divine encouragement given them unto the discharge of their duty. Moses had to face the haughty monarch of Egypt—then the mightiest kingdom on earth—and confront his wise men and magicians; yet, none were able to stand before him. Powerful nations were in possession of Canaan—among them, the giant Anakim

(Deu 9:2)—but none shall be able to withstand Joshua and those under him: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Jos 1:5).

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Jos 1:5). But was that blessed assurance designed only for Joshua and the Israelites of that day? Is it not recorded also for *our* sakes (Rom 4:23-24)? Then are we making practical use of it? Do we frequently remind ourselves of the same? Do we plead it before the throne of grace in time of need and ask God to make it good in our experience? Realising that we are called upon to “fight the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12), conscious of our weakness and the might of our foes, have we put God in mind of this word? If not, why not? Is not our failure at this point the explanation of many other failures? It is not enough that we should long to enter more fully into our heritage in Christ, we should also appropriate unto ourselves this blessed assurance and beg God to overthrow whatever is standing in the way and hindering us from a present and personal enjoyment of our spiritual portion. We should be daily and confidently entreating Him to teach us to vanquish the Anakim which are usurping our rightful heritage.

Should any doubt the dispensational validity of what we have just pointed out and demur at the idea of Christians today applying to themselves a specific promise made to Joshua thousands of years ago, then all room for a questioning of the same should at once be removed by the final clause of that verse: “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). Let the reader very carefully observe that that very promise is quoted in Hebrews 13 and a most important conclusion drawn from it: “For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:5-6). The very fact that the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to apply unto Christians that promise made unto Joshua, is a clear proof that they err grievously who follow the Scofield Bible in this matter. The practice of those who partition off the Scriptures under the pretence of “rightly dividing the word” (2Ti 2:15)—who insist that what God said unto His people in one dispensation does not pertain to those who live in another era—is here exposed as nothing less than an effort of Satan’s to rob the children of a rightful and needful portion of their Bread.

What has just been mentioned ought to be so obvious that it requires no further amplification; but since some of our readers have been wrongly instructed therein, we must labour the point a little further. Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as another? Does not God bear the same relation to them, and is He not affected alike unto all of His children? Does He not bear them the same love? If He would not fail or forsake Joshua, then He will not us. Are not Christians today under the same everlasting covenant of grace as were the Old Testament saints? Then they have a common charter: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Act 2:39). Let us not forget that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that *we* through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4). Then let this principle be held tenaciously by us: The divine promises which were made on special occasions to particular individuals are of general use for *all* the members of the Household of Faith.

“I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5) is one of the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God (2Pe 1:4), which is addressed to me now, as much as it was to Joshua of old, and therefore, is available for my faith to lay hold of and enjoy. Note the use which the apostle made of the same: “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6). Those words “so that” point an inference drawn from the promise: A double conclusion is thereby reached—confidence in God and courage against man. That intimates the various and manifold *use* we should make of God’s promises. The conclusion drawn by the apostle was based upon the character of the Promiser, and similarly should faith ever reason. Since God is infinitely good, faithful, all-powerful, and immutable, we may boldly or confidently declare with Abraham, “God will provide” (Gen 22:8); with Jonathan, “There is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (1Sa 14:6); with Jehoshaphat, “None is able to withstand thee” (2Ch 20:6); with Paul, “If God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31).

“So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6). Note attentively the change in number from the plural to the singular: General principles are to be appropriated by us in particular, as general precepts are to be taken by us individually—as the Lord Jesus individualized the “*Ye* shall not tempt the LORD your God” of Deuteronomy 6:16 when assailed by Satan (Mat 4:7)! It is only by taking the divine promises and precepts unto ourselves personally that we mix faith with the same and make a proper and profitable use of them. It is further to be observed that “The Lord is my helper” (Heb 13:6), etc., is a citation from Psalm 118:6. In that quotation, the apostle teaches us again that the language of the Old Testament is exactly suited unto the case of Christians now, and that they are fully warranted in appropriating the same “*we* may boldly say”—just what the Psalmist did! It was in a season of sore distress that David expressed his confidence in the

Lord, at a time when it appeared that his enemies were about to swallow him up; but contrasting the omnipotence of Jehovah with the feebleness of the creature, his heart was strengthened and emboldened.

Ah, but does the reader clearly perceive what *that* involved? It meant that David turned his mind away from the seen to the unseen. It means that he was regulated by faith, rather than by sight or reason. It means that his heart was occupied with the omnipotent One. But it means much more: He was occupied with the relationship of that omnipotent One unto himself. It means that he recognised and realised the spiritual bond there was between them, so that he could rightly and boldly say, “The Lord is *my* helper” (Heb 13:6). If He be my God, my Redeemer, my Father, then He can be counted upon to undertake for me when I am in sore straits, when my foes would devour me, or when my barrel of meal is well-nigh empty. But that “my” is the language of *faith* and “my helper” is the conclusion which faith’s assurance unhesitatingly drew. Often God so orders His providences and places us in trying circumstances that there may be suitable opportunity for our exercise of faith, and that He may be glorified by the same. Nothing honours Him more than the unquestioning confidence of our hearts when everything outward seems thoroughly against us.

Yes, David turned away his eyes from his numerous and powerful enemies unto the omnipotent One, and so should we. God will not disappoint us if we do: He never fails those who really trust Him. Consider another example which illustrates the same principle. On one occasion, “the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle” (2Ch 20:1). The king was quickly informed that “there cometh a great multitude against thee” (2Ch 20:2), and we are told that he “feared.” But that was not all he did: He “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2Ch 20:3). Then in the presence of the whole congregation, he prayed and pleaded with Jehovah, concluding with, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are *upon thee*” (2Ch 20:12). Nor did they look unto Him in vain. Read the sequel—verses 14-26: Without themselves striking a blow, the Lord smote their enemies with such a spirit of confusion that they fell upon one another and completely destroyed themselves.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

11. Its Recovery

We shall attempt little more here than seeking to show *the necessity* for recovery from a spiritual decline. Nor will that be an easy task—not because of any inherent difficulty in this aspect of our subject, but owing to the variety of cases which require to be considered, and which should be dealt with separately. There are some physical ailments, which, if handled promptly, call for comparatively mild treatment; but there are others that demand more drastic means and remedies. Yet, as any doctor will testify, many are careless about what are deemed trifling disorders, and delay so long in attending to the same, that their condition so deteriorates as to become dangerous and often fatal. In our last, we pointed out that every spot was not leprosy; yet, it should be remembered that certain spots which resembled that disease aroused suspicion, and required that the patient be examined by the priest, isolated from others, and kept under his observation, until the case could be more definitely determined—depending upon whether there was a further deterioration or spreading of the spot (Lev 13:4-8).

It is much to be doubted if there is any Christian on earth who so retains his spiritual vitality and vigour that he *never* stands in need of a “reviving” of his heart (Isa 57:15), that there is no time when he feels it requisite to cry “quicken thou me according to thy word” (Psa 119:25). Yet, it must not be concluded from this statement that every saint experiences a definite relapse in his spiritual life, and still less, that a life of ups and downs, decays and recoveries, backslidings and restorations, is the best that can be expected. The experiences of others are *not the Rule* which God has given us to walk by. Crowded dispensaries and hospitals do indeed supply a warning, but they certainly do not warrant my lapsing into carelessness, or fatalistically assuming that I, too, shall ere long be physically afflicted. God has made full provision for His people to live a holy, healthy, and happy life; and if I observe many of them failing to do so, it should stimulate me to greater watchfulness against the neglect of God’s provision.

After what has been dwelt upon in previous articles, it should scarcely be necessary to remind the reader that unless the Christian maintains close and steady communion with God, daily intercourse with the drawing from Christ's fulness, and regular feeding on the Word, the pulse of his spiritual life will soon beat more feebly and irregularly. Unless he meditates oft upon the love of God, keeps fresh before his heart the humiliation and sufferings of Christ, and frequents the throne of grace, his affections will soon cool, his relish for spiritual things will decrease, and obedience will neither be so easy, nor pleasant. If such a deterioration be ignored or excused, it will not be long ere his heart glides imperceptibly into carnality and worldliness: Worldly pleasures will begin to attract, worldly pursuits absorb more of his attention, or worldly cares weight him down. Then, unless there be a return unto God and humbling of the heart before Him, it will not be long—unless providence hinder—before he be found in the ways of open transgression.

There are degrees of backsliding. In the case of a real child of God, it always commences in the heart's departure from Him, and where that be protracted, evidences thereof will soon appear in the daily walk. Once a Christian becomes a backslider outwardly, he has lost his distinguishing character—for then, there is little or nothing to distinguish him from a religious worldling. Backsliding always presupposes a profession of faith and adherence unto Christ, though not necessarily the existence or reality of the thing professed. An unregenerate professor may be sincere, though deluded; and he may, from various considerations, persevere in his profession to the end. But more frequently, he soon wearies of it; and after the novelty has worn off, or the demands made upon him become more intolerable, he abandons his profession, and like the sow, returns to his "wallowing in the mire" (2Pe 2:22). Such is an apostate, and with very rare exceptions—if indeed there be any at all—his apostasy is total and final.

Up to the beginning of this article, we have confined ourselves unto the spiritual life of the regenerate, but we have now reached the stage where faithfulness to souls requires us to enlarge our scope. Under our last division, we dwelt upon spiritual decline: Its nature, its causes, its insidiousness, and its symptoms. It is pertinent, therefore, to enquire now, "What will be *the sequel* to such a decline?" A general answer cannot be returned, for as the decline varies considerably in different cases—some being less, and some more, acute, and extended than others—the outcome is not always the same. Where the relapse of a Christian be marked—if not to himself yet, to onlookers—he has entered the class of "backsliders," and that will cause the spiritual to stand in doubt of him. It is this consideration which requires us to enlarge the class to which we now address our remarks. Otherwise, unregenerate professors who have deteriorated in their religious life would be likely to derive false comfort from that which applies only to those who have been temporarily despoiled by Satan.

Unless spiritual decline be arrested, it will not remain stationary, but become worse; and the worse it becomes, the less are we justified in regarding it as a "spiritual decline," and the more does Scripture require us to view it as the exposure of a worthless profession. Hence, it is in that, that any degree of spiritual deterioration is to be regarded not complacently, but as something serious; and if not promptly corrected, as highly dangerous in its tendency. But Satan will attempt to persuade the Christian that though his zeal has abated somewhat, and his spiritual affection cooled, there is nothing for him to worry about—that even if his health has begun to decline, yet seeing he has not fallen into any great sin, his condition is not at all serious. But every decay is dangerous, especially such as the mind is ready to excuse and plead for a continuance therein. The nature and deadly tendency of sin is the same in itself, whether it be in an unregenerate, or a regenerate person; and if it be not resisted and mortified, repented of, and forsaken, the outcome will be the same: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren" (Jam 1:15-16).

Three stages of spiritual decline are solemnly set before us in Revelation 2 and 3. First, to the Ephesian backslider, Christ says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4). That is the more striking and searching, because there was much here that the Lord commended: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience...and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Rev 2:2-3). Yet, He adds, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." In this case, things were still all right in the external life, but there was an inward decay. Observe well that this divine indictment, "I have somewhat *against thee*, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4) is an unmistakably plain intimation that Christians are held accountable for the state of their love Godwards. There are some who seem to conclude from those words, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:5), that they have no personal responsibility in connection therewith, and who attribute to the sovereignty of God their coldness of heart, rather than blaming themselves for the waning of their affections. But that is highly reprehensible, being an adding of insult to injury.

It is as much the duty of a saint to maintain a warm and constant affection to Christ, as it is to preserve his faith in regular exercise; and he is no more warranted in excusing his failure in the one than in the other. We are expressly bidden, "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jud 1:21) and "Set your affection on things above" (Col 3:2); and

it is a horrible perversion and abuse of a blessed truth if I attribute my *not* doing so unto God's sovereign withholding from me the inclination. Those words of Christ's—"I have somewhat against thee" (Rev 2:4)—is the language of censure because of failure; and He certainly had not used it unless he was to blame. Observe, He does not merely say, "thou hast *lost* thy first love," as it is so frequently misquoted—man ever tones down what is unpalatable! No, "thou hast *left* thy first love" (Rev 2:4)—something more serious and heinous. One may "lose" a thing involuntarily, but to *leave* it is deliberate action! Finally, let us duly note that our Lord regarded that departure not as an innocent infirmity, but as a culpable sin, for He says, "repent"!

In his faithful sermon on Revelation 2:4, Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) pointed out that we ought to feel alarmed if we have left our first love, and ask the question, "Was I ever a child of God at all?" going on to say: "Oh, my God, must I ask *myself* this question? Yes, I will. Are there not many of whom it is said, "They went out from us..." because "...they were not of us" (1Jo 2:19)? Are there not some whose goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew—may that not have been *my* case? I am speaking for you all. Put the question: "May I not have been impressed under a certain sermon, and may not that impression have been a mere carnal excitement? May it not have been that I thought I repented, but did not really repent? May it not have been the case that I got a hope somewhere, but had not a right to it? and never had the loving faith that unites me to the Lamb of God? And may it not have been that I only thought I had love to Christ, and never had it; for if I really had love to Christ, should I be as I now am? See how far I have come down! May I not keep on going down until my end shall be perdition and the fire unquenchable? Many have gone from heights of a profession to the depths of damnation, and may I not be the same? Let me think, if I go on as I am, it is impossible for me to stop; if I am going downwards, I may go on doing so. And O, my God, if I go on backsliding for another year—who knows where I may have backslidden to? Perhaps into some gross sin. Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace! Perhaps I may backslide totally. If I am a child of God, I know I cannot do that; but still, may it not happen that I only thought I was a child of God?"

Searching as is the complaint of Christ to the Ephesian backslider, His word to the Sardinian is yet more drastic: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev 3:1). That does not signify that He was here addressing an unregenerate person, but rather, one whose conduct belied his name. His life did not correspond with his profession. He had a reputation for piety, but there was no longer evidence to justify it, no fruit to any longer warrant it. Not only had there been deterioration within, but also *without*. The salt had lost its savor, the fine gold had become dim; and hence, his profession brought no honour and glory to Christ. He bids him, "Be watchful"—for that was the very point at which he had failed—"and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die" (Rev 3:2), which shows that the "art dead" of verse 1 does not mean "dead in sins." "For I have not found thy works perfect before God"—not "complete" or "full." Good works were not yet totally abandoned, but many of them were lacking. Part of his duty was listlessly performed; the other part, neglected; and even the former was "ready to die."

Thus, it will be seen that the case of the Sardinian backslider is much worse than that of the Ephesian. There is no remaining stationary in Christianity: If we do not advance, we retrograde; if we be not fruit-bearing branches of the Vine, we become cumberers of the ground. Decay of grace is not a thing to be regarded lightly, and treated with indifference. If it be not attended to and corrected, our condition will grow worse. If we do not return to our first love—by heeding the injunctions laid down in Revelation 2:5—then we may expect to become like the Sardinian backslider: One whose witness for Christ is marred. Unless our hearts be kept right, our affection to Christ warm, then the life will soon deteriorate—our works will be deficient, both in quality and quantity, and those around us will perceive it. Ere long a "name to live" is all we shall have: The profession itself will be invalid, worthless, "dead."

But worst of all is the Laodicean professor (Rev 3:15-20). What makes his case so fearfully solemn is that we are to a loss where to place him, how to classify him—whether he be a real Christian who has fearfully backslidden, or naught but an empty professor. To him, Christ says, "Thou art neither cold nor hot" (Rev 3:15)—neither one thing, nor the other; but rather, an unholy mixture. Such are those who vainly attempt to serve two masters, who are worshippers of God one day, but worshippers of mammon the other six. To him, Christ goes on to say, "I would thou wert cold or hot"—that is, either an open and avowed enemy; or a faithful and consistent witness of Me. Be one thing, or the other: A foe, or a friend; an utter worldling, or one who is in Spirit and in Truth, a "stranger and pilgrim" in this scene. Corrupt Christianity is more offensive to Christ than is open fidelity. If he who bears His name does not depart from iniquity, *His* honour is affected. "Because thou art lukewarm...I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16): In thy present condition, thou art an offence to Me, and I can no longer own thee.

It is the figure of an emetic which Christ there uses: The mingling together of what is hot and cold, thus producing a "lukewarm" draught which is nauseating to the stomach. And that is exactly what an "inconsistent Christian"

is to the Holy One. He who runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds, who is one man inside the church and a totally different one outside, he who seeks to mix godliness with worldliness: “I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16)—instead of confessing his name before the Father and His holy angels. But observe what follows: “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev 3:17). Exactly opposite is this estimation of his from Christ’s. No longer “poor in spirit” (Mat 5:3), he declares himself to be “rich.” No longer coming to the throne of grace as a beggar to obtain help, he deems himself to be “increased with goods.” No longer sensible of his ignorance, weakness, and emptiness, he feels himself to “have need of nothing.” That is what makes his case so dangerous and desperate: He has no sense of personal need.

“And have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). As carnality and worldliness increase, so also does pride and complacency; and where they dominate, spiritual discernment becomes non-existent. Phariseeism and self-sufficiency are inseparable. It was to those who prayed, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers” (Luk 18:11), and who asked Christ, “Are we blind also?” (Joh 9:40)—to whom He said, “ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (Joh 9:41). The Pharisee boasted, “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luk 18:12): In his own esteem and avowal, he was “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev 3:17)—and for that very reason, he knew not that he was “wretched, and miserable, and poor” (Rev 3:17). That, too, is another form of the nauseating mixture which is so abhorrent to Christ: Orthodox in doctrine, but corrupt in practice. One who is loud in claiming to be sound in the Faith, but who is tyrannical and bitter toward those who differ from him—who holds “high doctrine,” but cannot live in peace with his brethren—is as offensive to Christ, as if he were thoroughly worldly.

Can such a character as the one who has just been before us be a real—though a backslidden—Christian? Frankly, we know not, for we are unable to say just how far a saint may fall into the mire and foul his garments before God recovers him, by answering him with “terrible things in righteousness” (Psa 65:5). Before He made good that awful threat and spued out the Laodicean professor, Christ made a final appeal to him: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev 3:18). But though we do not feel capable of deciding whether or not “the root of the matter” (Job 19:28) really be in him, two things are plain to us. First, that if I have left my first love (Rev 2:4), it will not be long before my profession will become “dead;” and unless it be revived, I shall soon be a Laodicien. Second, that while any person be in a Laodicean state, he has no Scriptural warrant to regard himself as a Christian, nor should others consider him as such.

There are many professing Christians who have declined in their practice of piety to a considerable extent, yet who comfort themselves with the idea that they will be brought to repentance before they die. But that is not only an unwarrantable comfort, but is presumptuously tempting God. As another has pointed out, “Whosoever plunges into the gulf of backsliding, or continues easy in it under the idea of being recovered by repentance, may find himself mistaken. Both Peter and Judas went in, but only one of them came out! There is reason to fear that thousands of professors are now lifting up their eyes in torment, who, in this world, reckoned themselves good men, who considered their sins as pardonable errors laid to their accounts as being brought to repentance: But, ere, they were aware, the Bridegroom came, and they were not ready to meet Him. They of whom it is said, they are “slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return” (Jer 8:5) are the ones “who draw back unto perdition” (Heb 10:39). And my reader, if you have left your first love, you have departed “from the living God” (Heb 3:12); and until you humbly and penitently return to Him, you can have no guarantee that you will not be a “perpetual backslider.”

We should carefully distinguish between the sin which indwells us, and our falling into sin. The former is our depraved nature, which God holds us accountable to make no provision for, to resist its workings, and refuse its solicitations. The latter is when—through lack of watching against indwelling corruptions—sin breaks forth into open acts. It is an injurious thing to fall into sin—whether secretly or openly—and sooner or later, the effects will certainly be felt. But to *continue* therein is much more evil and dangerous. God has denounced a solemn threatening against those who persist in sin: He “shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as *goeth on still* in his trespasses” (Psa 68:21). For those who have known the way of righteousness to pursue a course of sin is highly offensive to God. He has provided a remedy (Pro 28:13); but if instead of confessing and forsaking our sins, we sink into hardness of heart, neglect prayer, shun the company of the faithful, and seek to efface one sin by the committal of another, we are in imminent danger of being abandoned by God and are “nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb 6:8).

Let us return to the point where we almost began and ask again, “What will be the *sequel* to a decline?” It should now be still more evident that a general answer cannot be returned. Not only does God exercise His sovereignty here, using His own good pleasure and not acting uniformly, but differences from the human side of things have also to be taken into account. Much will depend upon whether it be the spiritual decline of a real Christian, or simply the religious decay of a mere professor. If the former, the sequel will vary according to whether the decline be internal only, or accompanied, or followed by falling into open sin. So, too, there is a doctrinal departure from God—as well as practical—as was the case with the Galatians. However, whatever be the type of case, this is certain, the one who lapses into a state of torpor needs to respond to that call, “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep...let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,” etc. (Rom 13:11-12).

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9. Its Reception

This brings us to the *manward* side of the subject, and that will present more or less a difficulty unto some of our readers—not because of its abstruseness, but in seeking to ascertain its consistency and harmony with some other aspects presented previously. It concerns the ever-recurring problem of adjusting in our minds the conjunction of the divine and human elements. Because that conjunction cannot always be stated with mathematical exactitude, or in language fully intelligible to the average mind, the great majority are inclined to cut the knot and reject either the one, or the other, of those elements or factors. But if both be clearly set forth in the Word—whether or not we can perceive the precise relation between them, or the definite point at which they meet—it is our bounden duty to believe and hold fast to both. If, on the one hand, Scripture teaches that *Christ* has effected reconciliation with God, Scripture just as plainly calls upon us to “be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) and speaks of *our* receiving the reconciliation. It is this latter aspect, we must now be occupied with: What God requires from the sinner if he is to enter into the good of what Christ did for sinners.

There ought to be no need to labour this point at any length, and there had been none, had not certain men—true servants of God, we doubt not, who were thoroughly sound on almost every other part of that Faith once delivered to the saints, and whose ministry has deservedly been held in high esteem by the generations who succeeded them—departed from the Truth thereon, and influenced many since their day to perpetuate a serious error. As we have previously pointed out, mutual alienation requires mutual reconciliation. The reconciliation of God to us, and of us to God, must answer the one to the other—for unless each party lay aside his enmity, no real amity is possible. If peace were on one side only, and hostility on the other, there would still be a breach. *God* must be propitiated; *we* must be converted: The one is as requisite as the other. As we have already shown at length how Christ reconciled God unto us, we must now enter into some detail of how we may be reconciled to God. That we are not about to depart from “the old paths” (Jer 6:16) will appear from the following quotations.

“Although God the Father hath transacted all these things from eternity and Jesus Christ hath long since performed all that which might pacify and reconcile His Father and procure our atonement with His Father, yet it was withal agreed mutually then by Them that not a man—no, not any elect man—should have benefit by either, until *they* came to be reconciled...He that will be reconciled to God must part with and forsake all other friends and lovers, renounce and break off all interests and correspondence with them, and choose God for his sole Friend and Portion—he must choose God forever, to cleave to Him with full purpose of heart” (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 122, 129). “We are *actually* justified, pardoned, and reconciled when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God in Christ may have towards us from all eternity, yet we are under the fruits of sin till we become penitent believers...That these are conditions which alone make us capable of pardon is evident” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677, *Works*, vol. 13, p. 266).

“This reconciliation, purchased by the blood of Christ, is offered unto men by the Gospel upon certain articles and conditions, upon the performance whereof it actually becomes theirs, and without which, notwithstanding all that Christ hath done and suffered, the breach still continues between them and God. And let no man think this a derogation from the freeness and riches of grace, for those things serve singularly to illustrate and commend the grace of God to sinners. As He consulted His own glory in the terms on which He offers us our peace, so it is His

grace which brings our souls to these terms of reconciliation. And surely, He hath not suspended the mercy of our reconciliation upon unreasonable or impossible conditions. He hath not said, If you will do as much *for* Me as you have done *against* Me, I will be at peace with you; but the two grand articles of peace with God are repentance and faith” (John Flavell, 1627-1691, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 476).

“To make perfect reconciliation (which Christ is said in many places to do), it is required, first, that the wrath of God be turned away, His anger removed, and all the effects of enmity on His part toward us. Secondly, that we be turned away from our opposition to Him and brought into voluntary obedience. Until *both* these be effected, reconciliation is not perfected” (John Owen, 1616-1683, *The Death of Death*, from *Works*, book 3, chapt. 6, para. 2 on “Reconciliation”).

“A mediator must be accepted by both parties that are at variance, and they must stand to what the mediator doth. As where two princes are at difference, and a third interposes to make an agreement between them, they must both consent to accept of that prince for mediator, and both put their concerns in his hand: He can be no mediator for him that does not accept of him in that relation...God hath declared Himself fully contented and hath complied with all the conditions of the first agreement (the everlasting covenant); it only remains now that man will accept of Him for those purposes for which God did constitute Him and *comply with those conditions* which God hath settled. This is necessary: God saves no man against his will” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 164).

Those excerpts supply a clear, if brief, idea of what was the almost uniform teaching of the Puritans on this subject. Probably, they will come as a real surprise unto a considerable number of our readers who are wont to regard those men as the champions of orthodoxy, and as the best-instructed scribes of the Gospel since the days of the apostles. If so, it is because they have imbibed subversive teaching, which came from *other men* that followed the Puritans in the eighteenth century—men who, though they upheld the banner of truth previously erected, yet, in other things, departed from the foundations laid down by their better-balanced predecessors. Though we highly respect these men, too, and freely acknowledge our indebtedness to many good things in their writings, yet, we dare not—and cannot—follow them in those things wherein they relied more on logical reasoning than on the teaching of Holy Writ. And for the sake of those who have been misled by the errors of men who otherwise taught the Truth, it devolves upon us to at least make an attempt to lead them back into “the good way” (Jer 6:16).

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). *That* is the ringing call of the Gospel, as it is addressed unto the unsaved. “Be ye reconciled to God”: Cease your hostility against Him, throw down the weapons of your rebellion, turn from your wicked ways, abandon your idols, repent of your sins, pursue mercy in the name of Christ, and receive forgiveness through His blood. But in certain more or less influential circles, that is flatly rejected. It is blankly denied that the Gospel calls upon the unsaved to be reconciled to God, or that He requires anything from sinners in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Nay, it is argued that such an assertion as ours repudiates the free grace of God and denies the finished work of Christ, by inculcating salvation by works and making man in part his own Saviour. *If* that were so, then it would necessarily follow that the most eminent and godly of the Puritans (quoted above) were guilty of those very crimes! But we deny that any such conclusion follows.

“Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) is both the demand of divine holiness and the enforcement of human responsibility. But because that Gospel call clashed with the views of certain men, they attempted to *explain away* its real force, insisting that those words are addressed to *saints* and not to the unconverted. A certain air of plausibility is given to that view by an appeal to the fact that this verse is found in a *church epistle*, but if due attention be paid to its setting, and the scope of the apostle in the whole passage be rightly ascertained, then the seeming “plausibility” disappears, and the untenability of such an interpretation is at once exposed. But in order to discover and exhibit the scope or design of the apostle here, careful attention has to be paid to the context, and considerable ground must be covered by the expositor to make the same clear. We fear this may prove rather tedious to some of our friends, yet beg them to bear with us for the sake of others who need—and for those who earnestly long for—the opening-up of this passage.

Let us give first, in few and simple words, what we are convinced is the force of 2 Corinthians 5:20, and then state *why* we so understand it, setting forth the grounds on which our conviction rests. When the apostle wrote those words, “Be ye reconciled to God,” he was *not exhorting* saved or unsaved. Rather was he giving a brief *account* of the evangelical message, which he had been called to deliver to the latter. In the light of the immediate context, we can come to no other conclusion. In the second half of verse 18, the apostle expressly declares that there had been given to him and his fellow-evangelists “the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18); and then in verses 19-21 (and 2 Corinthians 6:1-2!), he tells us—as the opening “to wit” unequivocally shows—*what* that “ministry of reconciliation” consisted of, what were its principal elements and contents. Before proceeding further, let the reader carefully

ponder verses 18-21 for himself, and see if he does not concur. If the meaning of verse 20 is still not clear to him, let him read again from verse 18, and *omit* the repeated “you” in verse 20, which is in italic (not in the original!), and all should be plain. But we will attempt a more thorough analysis of the passage.

As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs of the October and November 1944 articles on “The Prayers of the Apostles,” certain false teachers were very active against Paul at Corinth, seeking to undermine his apostolic authority and destroy his influence and usefulness. It is *that* which accounts for what he says in 1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:1-5; 15:9-11, and 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 10:2; 11:5, 12-16. It is *that* which explains why he was forced (by his adversaries) to vindicate his apostleship and point out that in authority, knowledge, and effective grace, none excelled him—see 2 Corinthians 11:22-23 for his credentials. It seems quite evident from a close reading of those two epistles that his enemies had succeeded so far as to shake confidence in himself of some of his own converts there; and hence, his appeals in 1 Corinthians 4:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:1-4, 13:3, etc. From those passages, it will be seen that Paul was on the defensive and obliged to justify himself and do what his modesty and humility detested—say much about himself and appear to resort unto boasting and self-laudation (2Co 11:16-18). In the light of those references, the apostle’s scope in the epistle should be more easily perceived.

Throughout the third chapter, he gives an account of how he had discharged the commission which he had received from his Master, acknowledging, tacitly, that he was no Judaiser (as were his opponents), but rather an able minister of the new testament or covenant (2Co 3:6). In the fourth, he continues the same subject, and makes mention of some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed (2Co 4:1, 8-14). Then, as was so often the case, his heart and mind (so to speak) ran away with him, and he digressed to describe the rich compensation which God had provided for His servants and people in general—their afflictions being abundantly counterbalanced and recompensed by the glory awaiting them, which he continues to chapter 5, verse 10. But in 2 Corinthians 5:11, he returns to the subject of his own ministerial labours, making known the springs from which they issued. Having alluded to “the judgment seat of Christ” (2Co 5:10), he declared, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2Co 5:11). Nothing is more calculated to stir the soul of Christ’s minister and make him earnest and faithful in dealing with his fellows, than the solemn realisation that naught but the “everlasting burnings” (Isa 33:14) await all who die out of Christ. It is that which makes him cry to his hearers, “flee from the wrath to come.”

(1) “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord...” (2) “...we persuade men”: The one was the cause; the other the effect. The “terror of the Lord” was not something of which the apostle stood in any doubt of, but a thing he *knew*—of which he was fully assured. And therefore, he “persuaded men” at large, reasoning with, pleading with, urging them to flee for refuge and personally lay hold of the hope which he set before them in the Gospel. An illustration that this *was* the course which he followed is supplied us in Acts 24:25, where we are told that, even when before one of his judges, “he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” so that “Felix trembled.” Alas, how little of such zeal and fidelity is there today on the part of those who profess to be the servants of God; how little is there in their preaching which makes the hearer “tremble”! How little does the twentieth-century evangelist resemble those of the first. If the reader of this paragraph be a preacher, let him honestly measure himself by this verse and ask, “Is the awful truth of the eternal punishment of the wicked in the Lake of Fire impelling me to so preach that in the day to come, I shall be ‘pure from the blood of all men’ (Act 20:26), or am I deliberately withholding what I know would be unpalatable unto my congregation?”

“But we are made manifest unto God” (2Co 5:11). That was a solemn appeal by the apostle unto the Searcher of hearts of his sincerity and fidelity. And then he added, “and I trust also are made manifest in *your* consciences” (2Co 5:11): I cherish the hope that such zeal and honest dealing with souls will make it evident, to your conscience at least, that I am indeed, and in truth, an accredited servant of God. Can the reader, if he be a preacher, make the same appeal both to the Omniscient One and the conscience of his auditors? “For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart” (2Co 5:12). It was not that the apostle would seek to ingratiate himself in the esteem of these unstable Corinthians, but that he reminded them of what they had already witnessed and experienced when he laboured among them—and that, in order that they could effectually close the mouths of his detractors, who sought to take advantage of his absence by destroying the confidence of those who were his own children in the Faith.

“For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause” (2Co 5:13). Here, he replies to one of the charges which his adversaries had brought against him—that he was a wild fanatic. Says the apostle, even if I be mad, it is for God’s glory that I have been so zealous; and if I had restrained myself within the bounds of sobriety, it was for your sakes. Whether he succeeded the limits of discretion as his enemies asserted, or whether he conducted himself decorously as men judged, it was not for himself—he had in mind only

the glory of God and the good of His Church. “For the love of Christ constraineth” me (2Co 5:14)—that was the second dynamic or motive-power of his ministry. That was what caused him to set aside all considerations of ease or self-aggrandizement and made him willing to be counted “the filth of the world,...the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1Co 4:13). Here again, we see a blessed *balance*: The “terror of the Lord” (2Co 5:11) and “the love of Christ” (2Co 5:14) inspiring him in all his ministerial labours. The love of Christ for sinners for himself: The love of Christ filling his heart and engendering a love for sinners made him willing to “spend and be spent” (2Co 12:15), “in labours more abundant” (2Co 11:23)—and to get little more than misunderstanding and misrepresentation, jealousy, and bitter persecution for his pains.

Cannot the impartial reader see for himself the drift, the scope, the line of things of Paul in this passage? Having mentioned “the love of Christ” (2Co 5:14) as constraining him to diligence in the ministry of the Gospel, he went on to enlarge upon the nature of that love: It was the One dying for the all (2Co 5:14); and then, to the end of verse 17, he describes some of the consequences and fruits of that love—upon which we must not now enlarge, as originally intended. The final fruits of Christ’s love here enumerated are that God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18). What that “ministry” consisted of, he tells us in verses 19-21. It “consists of two parts. 1. A reconciliation wrought on God’s part toward us, in the effecting of which Christ was concurrent with Him (2Co 5:19). 2. A reconciliation on our parts, enforced from what God and Christ had done (2Co 5:21), and this is equally necessary unto man’s salvation as that reconciliation on God’s part and Christ’s part” (T. Goodwin, vol. 6, p. 117). “The end of the ministry is to reconcile us to God, to prevail with us to lay down our enmity against Him and opposition to Him” (J. Owen, on 2 Corinthians 5:20).

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). We trust it is now clear that in those words, the apostle was “evidently *giving an account* of his commission and general ministry” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). That he should here do so is quite in accord with what he had done in the previous epistle—see 1 Corinthians 2:2 and 15:1-3. Thus, in this instance, we believe that that most able expositor, John Gill (1697-1771), erred in his interpretation of this verse—following as he did James Hussey rather than the earlier Puritans. So far from exhorting the saints unto “submission to providence and obedience to the discipline and ordinances of God,” the apostle was stating how he exhorted the unsaved when preaching the Gospel to them. Had Gill’s interpretation been valid, the twice italicised “you” *had been* in the text! If any supplement be needed, it should be “men.” “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) is the imperative demand of the Gospel to all who hear it, being parallel with, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him” (Isa 55:7).

The apostle continues the *same* subject in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6. “In this chapter (vv. 1-10), the apostle gives an account of his general errand to all whom he preached to, with several arguments and methods he used” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). It should be carefully noted that not until 2 Corinthians 6:11 did the apostle directly address himself to the Corinthians! Now, if Paul had been addressing the saints in 2 Corinthians 5:20, then in the opening verses of chapter 6, he must have been addressing their ministers, which is how Mr. Gill understood him. But in such case, he would *not* have said, “approving *ourselves* as the ministers of God” (2Co 6:4), but “*your-selves*”! Hence, it is manifest he was still vindicating himself and his fellow-apostles against the Judaisers. Not only were all who heard him preach the Gospel exhorted, “be ye reconciled to God,” but to “receive not the grace of God in vain” (2Co 6:1)—urging them not to procrastinate with the overtures of divine mercy, but to recognise and realise that “now is the accepted time” (2Co 6:2). Having been favoured with the Gospel, let them not spurn it.

On 2 Corinthians 6:1, J. Owen said, “The grace of God may be considered two ways. 1. *Objectively* for the revelation or doctrine of grace, as in Titus 2:11, 12. So we are said to ‘receive’ when we believe and profess it, in opposition unto those by whom it is rejected. And this is the same with receiving the Word preached, so often mentioned in the Scriptures: Acts 2:41, James 1:21, which is by faith to give it entertainment in our hearts, which is the meaning of the word in *this* place.” The “we” of 2 Corinthians 6:1 is the “*we* are ambassadors” of 2 Corinthians 5:20; and the “ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2Co 6:1) (His gracious overture in the Gospel) are the same “ye” as “be ye reconciled to God.” The meaning of “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God” (2Co 6:3-4) is that the apostles comported themselves in such a manner that there was nothing in their conduct which would hinder their Gospel preaching.

FEBRUARY

MISSING GOD'S BEST

There are many real Christians who live more under God's frowns than His smiles, who experience more of His chastening rod than His special favours, who are better acquainted with inward disquietude than that peace which "passeth all understanding" (Phi 4:7). Now, that ought not to be, and when it is so with any of us, the fault is entirely our own. However unpalatable that may be, it is the truth. Scripture is too plain on this point for any misunderstanding. "He doth not afflict willingly" (Lam 3:33). No, God afflicts, because we give him occasion to. Though we be His dear children, He will not wink at our waywardness, but will maintain the honour of His House and enforce the principles of His righteous government. If we be refractory, He will visit our iniquity with stripes (Psa 89:32). If we follow a course of self-will, and self-pleasing, then we shall be made to discover "the way of transgressors is hard" (Pro 13:15).

What has just been pointed out is neither "strange doctrine" nor "legalistic" teaching. Almost a century ago, the editors of "The Gospel Standard" in their "Address to the Reader" said: "We cannot, except to our own cost, set aside Scripture precepts and Scripture practice because our corrupt nature withstands them. God's ways may not please our carnal mind, but He will not alter them for that reason. If we walk contrary to Him, He will walk contrary to us; and if we are disobedient, we shall reap its bitter fruits. If sin be at one end of the chain, sorrow will surely be at the other. If we sow to the flesh, we shall most certainly of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." Note well those words. "We cannot, except to our own cost, set aside Scripture precepts and Scripture practice"—and that "cost" is *missing* God's best for us. But let us appeal again to His own Word.

In our last, we quoted that blessed, yet conditional, promise: "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2Ch 16:9). But let us note how solemnly the same verse ends: "Herein thou hast done foolishly: *therefore* from henceforth thou shalt have wars." Poor Asa's heart had *not* been "perfect toward" the LORD, and therefore, he missed His best. That Asa was a pious man is clear from 2 Chronicles 14:2, where we are told that he "did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God." Alas, like many, another whose early life promised well, it expired amid the shadows. And wherein was it that he failed so lamentably in the instance referred to above? 2 Chronicles 16:1-8 tells us: It was because at a crisis, he turned unto the arm of flesh, instead of relying upon the Lord his God—with which should be compared the final reference to him: "Yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians" (2Ch 16:12).

"I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it [i.e. thou shalt enjoy My best]. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels" (Psa 81:10-12). And were they not greatly the losers by it? Observe what follows: "Oh that my people *had* hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! *I should* soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries...*He should* have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee" (Psa 81:13-16). What could be clearer than that? By their waywardness and disobedient walk, they *forfeited* those blessings and missed God's best! Instead of subduing their enemies, He allowed those enemies to overcome them; instead of providing abundant harvests, He sent famines; instead of giving them pastors after His own heart, He suffered false preachers to deceive them.

"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isa 48:18). That also has reference to a people who had *missed* God's best. Alas, of how many of the saints is that divine lament true! It is much to be feared that this is the case with the majority of God's children today. They have been regenerated, and their lives are generally speaking ordered by the Word—otherwise, they would not be Christians at all—yet there is something in their lives which *hinders* the Lord from showing Himself strong in their behalf and making them prosper both spiritually and temporally. What that

something is, is plainly intimated in the above words: It is a spirit of disobedience, a failing to hearken to God's commandments, a falling short of walking in the full light which He has vouchsafed them. Privileges entail obligations: God requires much more from you today than He did ten years ago!—from those who enjoy an edifying ministry, than from those who do not (Luk 12:48).

Yes, the reason why the peace of those referred to in Isaiah 48:18 was *not* “as a river” and their “righteousness as the waves of the sea” was because they had failed to fully respond to the light God had granted them. We say “fully,” for one who rejects His light in total is unregenerate. It is a blessed thing, an unspeakable privilege, to be favoured with light from God, especially in a day when “the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isa 60:2)—which has been the case of Christendom the last few decades. The great majority of God's children “hath followed” the LORD “fully” (Num 14:24) *at first*, responding to the Spirit's illumination and adjusting their lives to the teachings of God's servants. And then a duty is shown them, or a denying of self is set before them which is more than flesh and blood can tolerate, and they *balk*, excusing themselves under one plea or another. Thereby, they choke the channel of blessing, grieve the Spirit, miss God's best—and if impenitent, have to smart under increasingly heavy chastisements.

“No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa 84:11): *That* is to enter into and *enjoy* God's best. Now set over against that, “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer 5:24): *That* is to forfeit and *miss* God's best. They who follow the devices of their own hearts, fall in with the customs of the world, or yield to the lusts of the flesh, not only deprive themselves of those blessings which are the portion of the obedient, but suffer needless adversities and painful afflictions from a faithful Father—as was clearly evidenced in the lives of Jacob and David. So too, later, in the history of that remnant of Israel who returned from Babylon to Palestine, unto whom God said, “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. *Because of* mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house [occupied with selfish interests rather than God's glory]. *Therefore* the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (Hag 1:9-10)—which, in New Testament language, means fresh supplies of the Spirit are withheld, and ye are fruitless branches of the Vine.

The point at which most Christians fail is not in committing transgressions—“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc 7:20)—but in *failing to put things right*! It is not so much the commission of sin, but sins unmourned for and unconfessed, which choke the channel of blessing. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper” no matter how well versed he be in the Truth or admired by his fellows; for there is a worm eating at the root of his spiritual life. “But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them [however heinous or numerous] shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13). See to it, my reader, that you make conscience of what men term “little sins” and excuse them not. See to it that you keep short accounts with God, penitently owning unto Him every known fault, if you would not miss His best. Acknowledge your transgressions, even though you have done so a thousand times previously. Avail yourself daily of the Fountain “opened...for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1).

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

26. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 2

“For this cause I bow my knees” (Eph 3:14): Because God has dealt so wondrously and bestowed upon you such favours (as those described in Eph 2:1 to 3:12), therefore, I seek from Him further blessings on your behalf; yea, in view of those marvellous exercises of divine grace and power, my heart is drawn out to ask for the highest possible benefits. “Unto the Father of our [not “the”] Lord Jesus Christ”—that is, I supplicate *our* gracious Father, and He is such, because He is the covenant-God of our Head, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15). Since all things have been gathered together in one in Christ, “both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph 1:10), the entire family receives its name from Him. Since Christ has been made the Head of all—of the celestial hierarchies, as well as of the Church (Eph 1:21-23; Col 2:10)—He has a proprietary right in the whole community: They all own Him, and He owns them all. Such is our understanding of the 15th verse.

Third, *its appeal*: “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be...” etc. (Eph 3:16). That states the rule by which the Lord is entreated to confer His favours: On the one hand, not according to the faith of faithfulness of His people; nor on the other, according to their spiritual indigence and need—but rather, and better, according to His own glorious riches. Indirectly, it is indeed an admission of our poverty and unworthiness, but directly, it is faith eyeing the fulness and sufficiency of the Lord of glory. “It is not His power to the exclusion of His mercy, nor mercy to the exclusion of His power, but it is everything in God which renders Him glorious—the proper object of adoration. The apostle prays that God would deal with His people according to the plenitude of grace and power, which constitutes His glory and makes Him to His creatures the source of all good” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). But the “riches of his glory” includes more than His grace and power, comprehending “everything in God which renders Him glorious.” It was an appeal to His goodness, munificence, His infinite resources, the plenitude of His perfections.

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory” (Eph 3:16). To aid our feeble understandings, the Spirit here, as so frequently, speaks after the manner of men: The things which they count of highest value are termed their “riches.” Now, elevate that concept to a vastly superior plane. The Lord, too, has *His* “riches,” and as our thoughts can rise no higher than that which is super-eminent or glorious, they are styled, “the riches of his glory.” They are not only riches of glory or glorious riches, “but his riches in glory” too (Phi 4:19); that is, celestial riches, those which are His on high—an earnest or foretaste of which the saints are granted even in this life. The reference is to Christ’s abundant fulness, as He is “the heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). As such, He is possessed of inexhaustible resources for the supplying of our every need. There is in Him amplitude and plenitude of glory, and “according to” the same, we should ask Him to minister unto us.

Glory is something more than excellency: It is excellence made manifest and brought into high esteem. It is the perfection of the divine character displayed and made real and ineffable unto our hearts. The wondrous and blessed thing is that He has joined His glory with the good of His people. The two things are inseparably connected together—they glorying in Him, He being glorified in them. It is, therefore, our happy privilege to prefer our requests with this fact before us, and ask Him to bestow His favours upon us accordingly. Thus it was here. The apostle was about to rise to the very pinnacle of petitionary prayer, seeking for Christians the most glorious things they could be granted, and he made that his *plea*—will it not be for Thy glory to grant such requests and vouchsafe such blessings! If we be straitened, it is not in the Lord, but in ourselves, and the fault is entirely our own. We should eye by faith the fulness of the divine perfections, for the riches of the God-man Mediator are as unlimited as the illimitable glory of the divine nature itself.

Fourth, *its petitions*. Before turning to them in detail, let us proffer a few general remarks thereon. The requests which the apostle was about to make are prefaced by the explanatory words, “For this cause.” He was on the point of asking that they should be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith, from which petitions it might be inferred that their condition was a parlous one, or at any rate, that they were in a weak and low case. Yet, there is nothing whatever in the whole of the context which lends colour to that idea. No, rather was it because of the wondrous things which God had already done for them that Paul was encouraged to ask Him that these saints might be granted enlarged apprehensions and enjoyments of His favours. So far from settling on our lees when the Lord has bestowed signal blessings upon us, that should stimulate us to desire and seek further gifts at His hand. *That* is the practical lesson for us to learn from the “For this cause,” and the petitions which follow it.

But that is not all there is for us in the particular detail to which we have just directed attention. There is something else in it which we need to take to heart—namely, that those who have received the highest favours from God are in real need of prayer, of themselves seeking unto the mercy-seat. Why so? That they may be enabled to make a good use of what has been conferred upon them and walk worthy of the same. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Luk 12:48), and only fresh supplies of divine grace can enable us to meet that requirement; and such supplies must be earnestly and daily sought by us. Privileges entail obligations, and spiritual obligations cannot be discharged in our own strength. God had richly blessed the Ephesians, and for that cause or reason, the apostle prayed for them to be strengthened with might by Christ’s Spirit in the inner man, that they might truly appreciate those blessings and express their gratitude in lives which would redound to the glory of the Giver of them.

We should also ponder these petitions in the light of how God is here addressed and the plea made to Him. No doubt, the reader, like the writer, has heard prayers in which the body of them bore little or no relation to their opening language: Prayers that began by addressing the Deity in high-sounding names, but which had no connection with or appropriateness unto the petitions that followed. Very different are the prayers of Scripture. There, we

find the introductory ascriptions are most suited to what follows, that the particular character in which God is addressed bears an intimate respect unto the requests made to Him. For example, when Jacob was in deadly fear of Esau, he supplicated the Lord thus: “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto *thy country*... Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother” (Gen 32:9-11). It was unto his fathers (and their seed) that God had promised to give Canaan! So also when the souls under the altar begged God to avenge their blood, they addressed Him as, “O Lord, holy and true” (Rev 6:10).

In the prayer before us, the address is made unto “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and what follows is an appeal unto His fatherly affections and solicitude. He has told us that, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Psa 103:13). What freedom of heart should the realisation of that blessed fact give us when we approach unto the throne of grace! The Redeemer, too, has assured us, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11)! It is to no unwilling Bestower the saint approaches, whose reluctance to communicate has to be overcome by his entreaties, but to a loving Father who is more ready to give than we are to ask. How that ought to melt and encourage us! Because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is our Father, too, as and such more ready to impart good things to us than the tenderest earthly parent can be to his little ones. It was *thus* the apostle here viewed Him, and he framed his requests accordingly.

Nor should we overlook the clause that immediately follows: “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15). It seems to us that the apostle turned that also into a plea. It was as though he said: “O blessed Lord, many of Thy dear children are now in Thine immediate presence on high, but there are some of Thy loved ones still in the place of need here below. Those with Thee above are enjoying the beatific vision. Let not all blessedness be confined unto them, but grant that a portion at least of the same—yea, a goodly portion—be given to those who are yet in this howling wilderness.” So should we make practical use of, turning into a supplicatory *plea*, every doctrinal statement of the epistles. “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory” (Eph 3:16). Paul’s gaze was directed upward to a sphere of ineffable purity and felicity, and to the One who occupied the central place in it. It was that which moved him to seek for no ordinary favours, but for blessings which were accordant to and commensurate with the infinite riches of His glory.

The blessings which Paul here sought for the saints stand out in glaring contrast from the mean and meager petitions which many believers are wont to make today. The great majority of professing Christians seem to regard the substance and sum of salvation as consisting in a deliverance from the penalty of their sins and an assurance that they will spend eternity in Heaven. They appear to have little or no concept of the glorious privileges which are theirs in this present interval: Their being mightily energized by the indwelling Holy Spirit, their access to and enjoyment of Christ within the veil, their growing up into Him in all things, their being fulfilled with all the fulness of God. Those petitions of Paul present possibilities in the Christian life that few contemplate, and fewer still strive after. A knowledge of sins forgiven is indeed an inestimable boon, yet that stands at the very outset of Christian experience, and is but an earnest of far greater and grander blessings, which the Father will bestow upon us if we follow on to know Him and seek to lay hold of that for which we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus, reaching forward unto those things which are before (Phi 3:12-14).

We say again, if we be straitened, it is in ourselves and not in the Lord, and the fault is entirely ours. He has set before us a rich feast in the Gospel: “A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa 25:6). No niggard Host is our God, nor would He have us partake sparingly of His bounties: “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink *abundantly*, O beloved” (Song 5:1) is the call of His largess unto us. “Open thy mouth *wide*” is His invitation, “and I will fill it” (Psa 81:10) is His promise. Then how deeply ashamed of ourselves should we be if we have occasion to cry, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!” (Isa 24:16). Such “leanness” brings no honour unto Him. Such “leanness” reveals how far below our privileges we are living. Such “leanness” is the consequence of failing to avail ourselves of the rich provisions God has made for us, and such failure is to be traced back unto the *defectiveness* of our prayer-lives: “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (Jam 4:2)!

Let it be carefully observed that the apostle did not preface his petitions by saying, “O God, if it can be possible, bestow these glorious spiritual riches upon Thy people.” No, indeed, he would not so insult the One who has told us, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also *freely* give us *all things*?” (Rom 8:32)—yes, “freely,” not grudgingly. Not once in their prayers for the saints do we find any of the apostles qualifying their petitions with “*if it be Thy will*.” It is true that the Redeemer prayed in Gethsemane, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39), but *He* was there in a situation which *we* can never occupy, and never once did He teach His disciples to pray thus:

Contrast Matthew 7:7, John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23; and contrast, too, His own “Father, I will” of John 17:24! True, our wills must be subordinated to the divine, yet it is both our privilege and duty to be “understanding what the will of the Lord *is*” (Eph 5:17).

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14). That does not refer to His eternal decree or secret will, which concerns no part of our responsibility, but His *revealed will*, as made known to us in His Word. In the Word, God has plainly declared that He is ready to bestow, in response to the prayer of faith, whatever will be for His glory and for our good. Nor has He left undefined what is for His glory and our good: The recorded prayers of the apostles plainly reveal the same unto us. We need, therefore, have no hesitation whatever in praying that we may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God—for it is God’s revealed will that we *should* ask for those very things, and it is nothing but a false or mistaken humility for us to add to His words, “if it be Thy will.” It *is* God’s will, or the apostle would not have been moved by the Holy Spirit to make such requests and then place them on record for our guidance.

In view of such passages as Psalm 81:10, Song of Solomon 5:1, Romans 8:32, etc., it is truly pitiful to hear so many professing Christians praying as though God were either a “hard Master” or One whose riches were very limited. He has expressly bidden them, “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1Co 12:31), yet how few of them do so. How little holy ambition have they to enter into God’s best for them, to grow in grace, to be fruitful branches of the Vine, to show forth His praises. How little of His truth, His holiness, His grace seems to satisfy them. They exist, rather than live; paddle in the ocean of His love, rather than swim in it. Their desires are weak, their expectations small, their aspirations almost nil. To “covet earnestly the best gifts” is to long intensely for them, with the implications of a corresponding zealous effort to obtain those divine bestowments, which will make for increased piety and usefulness; and this, not only for ourselves, but for our fellow-saints too. That is exactly what the apostle was doing here: Coveting earnestly the best gifts for the Ephesians.

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). That each was the first thing which Paul requested the Father on their behalf. Let each Christian reader ponder it thoughtfully and hopefully. Let him seek to realise now, if he has never done so before, that the pardon God bestowed upon him at the hour of conversion was but *the beginning* of the fulfilment of His purpose of grace towards him, that He has far better things awaiting him in *this* life. His forgiveness of your sins was but a means to an end, with a design to something further and richer. Let the Christian reader recognise that he has not yet begun to conceive of the rich heritage unto which God has begotten him, unless he perceives that it is his privilege, his duty, his rightful portion to be strong with the strength of the divine Spirit. The devil would fain persuade you that God would have His child remain frail and feeble in this life, but that is one of his many lies. God’s revealed will for us is the very reverse—namely, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph 6:10). O my reader, suffer not Satan to deceive you any further, but seek right now to possess what Christ has purchased for you.

It is just because it is God’s revealed will that we should be spiritually hale and hearty, that we are to seek strength from Him, and therefore, seek it *expectantly*. Had He not discovered to us His good pleasure on this matter, we might have been in some doubt how to act, but since He has made known His mind thereon, our course is quite clear. Let the reader turn to Ezekiel 36:25-36 and observe the blessed promises which God has there made to His people, closing with the declaration, “I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it” (Eze 22:14). And then let him attentively observe that in the very next verse, we are told, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this *be enquired* of by the [spiritual] house of Israel, *to do it* for them” (Eze 36:37). Divine favour does not release us from our duty—of realising and acknowledging our dependency upon Him. Divine promises are given for faith to lay hold of and plead before the throne of grace. It is God’s revealed will that Christians should be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, but it is also His will that they should earnestly covet the same and believingly seek it from Him by fervent supplication.

The apostle Paul had himself declared, “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is *renewed* day by day” (2Co 4:16); nevertheless, the knowledge of that did not render it meaningless, nor needless, to *pray for* that very thing! God does not treat us as though we were irrational creatures, but as moral agents; and therefore, He requires our concurrence and co-operation—not to assist Him, but for the discharge of our responsibility, and more especially, for the calling into exercise of those spiritual graces which He has imparted to His children. We must ask if we would receive. And we must ask expectantly, for according unto our faith, will it be unto us (Mat 9:29). It is much to be thankful for if we have been made conscious of our deep need, yet that will avail us nothing, unless we have also learned how to obtain daily supplies of grace. It is in answer to importunate prayer that God gives of

His best unto us. David was in sore straits, but he knew whither to turn for relief: “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3).

The Christian is as entirely dependent upon the continued operations of the Spirit as he was for His initial ones, for of himself, he can no more sustain his spiritual life, or maintain his faith, than he could originate them. If the Spirit were to suspend His operations, we should be helpless, for He it is who works in us both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure (Phi 2:13). Indwelling sin is not weakened by regeneration, and the flesh never ceases its exertions. So it is, too, from without: Satan is ever seeking an advantage against us. Moreover, the soul is strangely deluded by the treachery of our senses, and the revolt of our passions when temptations assail us, so that unless seasonable relief be granted, we are soon overcome. Without the Spirit’s help, we can neither mortify our lusts (Rom 8:13), pray aright (Rom 8:26), nor bear fruit (Eph 5:9). Yet, there must be our concurrence: We may, we can concur, or we should differ nothing from the unregenerate. God works all works for and in us, yet also *by* us.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

6. The Great Commission, Part 3 (1:1-9)

When Jehovah called Moses to go down into Egypt and make known His demand unto Pharaoh, He assured His servant, “I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Exo 4:12). When Jeremiah was ordained a prophet unto the nations, and he shrank from the task before him, God said, “They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee” (Jer 1:19). With such assurances does the Lord fortify the hearts of those whom He commissions to go forth in His name. Similarly, when the risen Redeemer bade His apostles make disciples of all nations and baptise them, He first emphasised the fact that “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” and then comforted them with the declaration, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:18-20). So, too, when He told Paul to remain at Corinth, He cheered him thus: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Act 18:9-10).

In like manner, did the Lord prepare Joshua for the undertaking to which he was called. First, He gave him the threefold assurance, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). The time had arrived when he was to lead the people of Israel across the Jordan and marshal their forces for the conquest of the promised land. On the threshold of that difficult and dangerous task, Jehovah had thus encouraged and animated His servant. Great were the obstacles and perils confronting them, but great, too, were the consolations here vouchsafed him. Highly favoured as was Joshua in being made the recipient of such promises, yet they were not designed to set aside the discharge of his own responsibility: He was not to say within himself, “These covenant engagements will certainly be fulfilled, so there is no need for me to be exercised.” So far from using them as a couch for him to rest upon, they were designed as a girdle wherewith to gird up his loins for future activities.

“Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous” (Jos 1:6-7). The divine assurance received by Joshua was therefore intended as a spur unto energy, as an incentive to the performance of duty, for the quickening of his heart unto the same. The connection between this exhortation and what immediately precedes it inculcates a most important practical lesson: God’s promises are not meant to set aside His precepts, but rather, are given to encourage us to do with all our hearts and might whatever he has bidden us. Assurances of divine assistance must never be regarded as nullifying our accountability, or as rendering needless the putting forth of our utmost endeavours, but instead, are to be taken as so many guarantees that if we be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (the discharge of our daily duties), then we may “know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58).

Those professing Christians who reason that God has promised never to leave nor forsake us (Heb 13:5)—and therefore, it is quite safe for us to flirt with the world and trifle with sin—do but make manifest the unregenerate condition of their hearts. They who take unto themselves the divine declaration, “He which hath begun a good work

in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6), and then conclude there is no need for them to make their calling and election sure, or desire the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby, render it very doubtful that a good work has been begun in *them*. They who say, “God will assuredly fulfill His decrees and draw unto Christ all whom He has ordained unto eternal life, and therefore, there is no need for us to be deeply concerned about souls and seek after their salvation,” speak not the language of His true children, but wrest the Truth. If our response to God’s promises be that of sloth and carelessness, that is proof we have received them carnally and not spiritually. The use or misuse we make of the divine cordials affords a good index of the state of our hearts.

God had just assured Joshua “I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Jos 1:5). That language was unequivocal and unqualified, yet it was far from signifying that he might take things easily, or simply, “stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exo 14:13)—words which have been grievously misapplied. No, rather were they designed to inspire him to the performance of duty and to let him know that his efforts should not be in vain. “Be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:6): That was the first effect which those assurances should work in him; and until they *did*, he was not fitted for the task before him. That task entailed the facing of problems and dangers, such as were enough to make the stoutest heart to quake; nevertheless, Joshua was to undertake it without trepidation or hesitation. And why so? Because the living God—the omnipotent Jehovah—had declared that not a man should be able to stand before him, that *He* would not fail nor forsake him. Then what was there to fear? Had not Joshua good ground, sufficient reason, to be strong and to act valiantly?

Upon entering Canaan, powerful enemies had to be faced, for the land was inhabited by races of giants—men who were famous both for stature and strength. They were a fierce and warlike people, strongly armed, for they had “chariots of iron” (Jos 17:16). True, but God had said, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). Formidable obstacles had to be overcome. The cities of the Canaanites were fortified, described by the ten spies as “great and walled up to heaven” (Deu 1:28). That was the language of unbelief’s exaggeration, yet they were mighty strongholds which had to be overthrown. Even so, God’s “I will not fail thee” (Jos 1:5) was more than sufficient. Again, there was the food problem to be considered. In the wilderness, the Israelites had been daily supplied with manna from heaven, but that was now to cease. When the Jordan was crossed, that great host of people must quarter on the enemy. Who was to provide for such a multitude? How should they be fed? Was not such a problem enough to make Joshua quail? No, not after he had received such assurances.

Not only were the Canaanites a numerous and powerful foe, but those whom Joshua commanded were a most unpromising people. What trouble they had occasioned his predecessor in the desert! Ever ready to murmur, wanting to turn back to Egypt, stiffnecked, and with no faith in Jehovah. What could Joshua expect from their immediate descendants? How far could he count on their loyalty and co-operation? Was it not more than likely that their hearts would turn from him, as those of their fathers so often had from Moses? Even so, God had said, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). How well suited were those divine assurances to be his situation! In view of them, what good reason had the Lord to bid him, “Be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:6)? And in view of the same, what sufficient ground had Joshua to go forward in full confidence and valour! So he *would*, if he took those promises to heart and mixed faith with them. Ah, it all turned on that. As cause stands to effect, so would the laying hold of those promises produce strength of spirit and courageous action. Joshua did receive them by faith, and such was their effect upon him.

What bearing does the above have upon *us* today? In our last, we pointed out that the promise of Joshua 1:5 belongs to Christians today—and here, we must insist that the precept, “Be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:6) is also addressed to us personally, that God so enjoins *us*. “Quit you like men, be strong” (1Co 16:13), “Be of good courage” (Psa 31:24) make known the divine requirements from us. Those are the graces specially needed by believers if they are to overcome their enemies, surmount the obstacles in their path, and possess their possessions. “Granted,” says the reader, “but when you bid me, ‘be strong,’ you do but tantalize me, seeing that is the very thing I desire to be, and yet, am conscious I am not.” But cannot you see the fault is entirely your own?—that your weakness and fear are due to your failure to mix faith with God’s promises? What more do you want than what God has said to you in Joshua 1:5? If God be for you, who can be against you? Look away from yourself, from your enemies, from your difficulties, unto Him who hath said, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5): Count upon Him, and strength will displace weakness; and courage, fear.

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, *that* thou mayest observe *to do* according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee” (Jos 1:7). This exhortation is not a mere repetition of the one in the previous verse, but a particularizing of it, or an application of the same to a specific duty. The “Be strong and of a good courage” of verse 6 was more general; this here relates especially to walking in the way of God’s commandments.

Resoluteness, fortitude, daring, and perseverance were required for the great exploits which lay ahead; yet, equally necessary and essential—if less apparent unto some today—was strength and courage, if Joshua was to be completely *submissive* to the legislation of his predecessor. The world admires most the man who is independent, strikes out along a line of his own, and counts meekness and submission as a mean-spirited thing. It is the free-thinker and the free-liver who is generally admired by the godless, and obedience is despised as something servile. Joshua was now virtually made king in Jeshurun, and it called for real courage for Israel's commander-in-chief to take his orders from another—and especially so, when the carrying out of the same seemed to be a hazardous matter.

Let the Christian faithfully apply this exhortation unto himself, and perhaps he will the better perceive what it involved for Joshua. “Only be *thou* strong and very courageous, that [in order that] thou mayest observe to do according to all the law” (Jos 1:7). Is there not an inseparable connection between the two things?—is not courage required in order to obedience? Fellow-Christian, if your character and conduct are to be regulated by the divine standard, if all the details of your life are to be ordered by God's statutes, what will men think and say of you? Will they not deem you mad? It calls for courage—courage of a high order—for a preacher to scorn all novelties and disdain the contemptuous sneers of his fellows that he is “behind the times,” because he declares only the counsel of God. And it calls for real courage for the private Christian to cleave close to the path of obedience when many professors will sneer at his “strictness” and “strait-lacedness.” How many are *afraid* of being thought “queer” or “puritanical”! Ah, my reader, it requires resolution and valour to swim against the tide of popular opinion, as it does to differ from “our doctrines,” if one sees that God's Word requires it.

“That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:7). There was the commission which Joshua received from the Lord. He was not to be regulated by his own inclinations, nor lean unto his own understanding, he was not to be governed by the principle of expediency, nor be seeking to please those under him; instead, he must be actuated in all things by a “thus saith the LORD.” For the carrying out of that commission, he needed strength and courage, so that he might be daring enough to strictly heed the instructions which Moses had left in writing for him. And in order to the exercise of those graces, his heart must be constantly occupied with the assuring promises God had given him. So God's servant today must teach His people to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, resting on His promise, “Lo, I am with you alway” (Mat 28:20). So, too, the private Christian must heed that word, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do” (Joh 2:5), counting on His promise to make his way prosperous.

As another has pointed out, “In Joshua's case, full obedience to the divine command involved innumerable difficulties, such as besieging fortified cities and fighting against warriors who came to battle in chariots of iron armed with scythes.” He who contemplates enlisting under the banner of Christ needs well to sit down and count the cost, for it is no child's play to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev 14:4). A merely nominal profession is easy enough to make and maintain after the manner of the times, but to be a real Christian means to deny self, take up the Cross, and go forth unto Christ without the camp. Through his obedience, Joshua made many enemies. When it became known that Jericho had been captured and Ai vanquished, we read of certain kings confederating together to destroy him. Such will be the experience of the obedient Christian. It will be his desire and effort to make no enemies, but if he is faithful to Christ, many of his old friends will turn against him, and he probably prove that his foes are found even in his own household. “Woe unto you” if “all men shall speak well of you!” (Luk 6:26).

Joshua's obedience required strength and courage, because it involved years of *persevering effort*. Rome was not built in a day, nor was Canaan captured in twelve months. Long marches, protracted campaigns, much heavy fighting was entailed before Israel fully entered into possession of their heritage. As another has said, “The days were not long enough for his battles. He bids the sun stand still and the moon is stayed: and even when that long day has passed, yet the morning sees him sword in hand still. Joshua was like those old knights who slept in their armour. He was always fighting.” Such is the life of the Christian: A warfare from end to end. No sooner does he receive pardon from Christ than the great conflict. Every yard of the narrow way which leadeth unto Life is contested—not a foot will Satan yield to him. When victory has been obtained over one lust, another immediately raises its ugly head. When one temptation has been overcome, ten others more subtle menace him. There is no respite, no furlough is granted. “But he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat 10:22), and none other will. Something more than human strength and prowess is called for.

“Do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left” (Jos 1:7). As one has well pointed out, “It is the exactness of obedience which constitutes the essence of

obedience.” The fact is that if we do not desire and earnestly endeavour to keep *all* of God’s commandments, we are totally lacking in the spirit of genuine obedience. He who picks and chooses between them is a self-pleaser, and not a God-pleaser. The vast majority in Christendom today say, “We must not be too precise”—but that is too thin a garb to cover their hypocrisy. At heart, they want to turn their backs on God’s Law altogether, but as an open avowal of such a sentiment would at once expose them, they resort to such cant as, “We must not be too nice, too strict, too particular.” It is this temporizing and compromising which has brought Christendom into the sorry state that it is now in. An omission here, and a human addition there, opened the flood-gates of evil. As the Lord will have all our hearts, or nothing, so He will accept only an obedience which respects all His commandments (Psa 119:6)—and not one which is partial and discriminating.

Joshua was granted no indulgence, but must adhere rigidly and constantly to the Rule set before him. No matter how contrary to natural wisdom and prudence might be the carrying out of its precepts, no matter how unpopular it should make him with the people of Israel, God required full and continuous obedience from him. And so He does of us today, and unto those of His nominal disciples who fail to render the same, He asks, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luk 6:46). Yes, “nominal” disciples is all they are, for He Himself declares, “that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luk 12:47). It is probable that the apostle had Joshua 1:7 in mind when he said, “by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (2Co 6:7)—righteousness is right doing, acting according to the standard of right, namely, the Law of God. When one said to a Puritan, “Many people have rent their consciences in halves; could you not just make a little nick in yours?” He answered, “No, I cannot, for my conscience belongs to God.”

Finally, let us notice that the path of obedience is the path of *prosperity*: “Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that [in order that] thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:7). Conformity unto the revealed will of God may entail trial, but there will be abundant compensation. Of course, there shall, for the Lord will be no man’s Debtor. The path of obedience is the path of blessing: The treading thereof may incur the frowns of men, but what matters that if we have the smile of our Master! True, the prosperity may not immediately appear—for faith has to be tried and patience developed—yet in the long run, it will be found that in keeping the divine commandments, “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11). So Joshua found it, as he adhered strictly to the divine Law, and success crowned his efforts—and that is recorded for *our* encouragement. Let us not forget that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that *now is*, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8)—yet, that promise is conditioned by our keeping of the precepts.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

11b. Its Recovery

In our last, we sought to make clear the urgent *necessity* for recovery from a spiritual decline. We turn now to consider its *desirability*. Look at it first from the *Godward* side. Is it not inexcusable that we should so evilly requite the eternal Lover of our souls? If He who was rich for my sake became so poor that He had not where to lay His head in order that I (a spiritual pauper) might be made rich, what is due Him from me? If He died the shameful death of the Cross that you might live, is not your life to be devoted wholly to Him? If you be Christ’s, “ye are not your own” and “bought with a price,” and therefore called upon to “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19-20). If He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, think you that He is unmoved if we leave our “first love” (Rev 2:4) and divide our affections with His rivals? Do you suppose that a back-slidden Christian affords Him any pleasure! Surely, you are aware of the fact that such a case brings no honour to Him. Then let His love constrain you to return and reform your ways, so that you may again show forth His praises and give him delight.

Consider your case in view of *other Christians*. There is a bond uniting the saints which is closer than any natural tie: “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5); and there-

fore, those “members should have the same care one for another” (1Co 12:25). So vital and intimate is that mystical union that if “one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” (1Co 12:26). If one member of your physical body is affected, there is a reaction throughout your whole system: So it is in the mystical Body. The health or sickness of your soul exerts a very real influence—either for good, or for evil—upon your brethren and sisters. For *their* sake then, it is most desirable that, if in a spiritual decline, you should be restored. If you be not, your example will be a stumblingblock to them, and if they have much association with you, their zeal will be dampened, and their spirits chilled. Surely, it is not a matter of little concern whether you be a help—or hindrance—to your fellow-saints. “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mat 18:6).

Contemplate your case in connection with *your unsaved relatives* and friends. Do you not know that one of the main obstacles in the way of many from giving a serious consideration to the Gospel is the inconsistent lives of so many who profess to believe it? Years ago, we read of one who was concerned about the soul of his son, and on the eve of his departure for a foreign land, sought to press upon him the claims and excellency of Christ. He received this reply: “Father, I am sorry, but I cannot *hear* what you say, for *seeing* what you do”! Is that the unuttered sentiment of your child? You may reply, “I do not believe that anything in my conduct can have any influence on the eternal destiny of any soul.” Then you are woefully ignorant. “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word *be won by* the conversation [behaviour] of the wives” (1Pe 3:1). In saving sinners, God uses a variety of means; as in prejudicing sinners, Satan employs many agents: Is God, or Satan, most likely to *use you*? Most certainly the latter, if you be in a backslidden state.

Coming lower still, let us appeal to *your own interests*. What have you gained by leaving your “first love”? Have you found the vanities of this world more pleasing than the feast which the Gospel sets before you? Does association with empty professors and the ungodly supply more satisfaction to the heart, than fellowship with the Father and His Son? No, the very opposite. Rather, have you discovered that in forsaking the Fountain of living waters, you have betaken yourself to broken cisterns which hold none (Jer 2:13)? The joy of salvation you once had is departed; the peace of God which passeth all understanding that formerly ruled your heart and mind through Christ Jesus, does so no longer. Today, your case resembles that of “the prodigal”—feeding on husks in the far country, while the rich fare of the Father’s House is no longer partaken of by you. An uneasy conscience, a restless spirit, a joyless heart is now your portion. Have you not reason to cry, “Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When his candle shined upon my head...As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle” (Job 29:2-4)? Then whose fault is it that you do not again have that blessed experience?

Yes, from every viewpoint, it is most desirable that a Christian be recovered from his spiritual decline. Yet, it is also important that he should not conclude he *has* been recovered, when such is *not* the case. Since a backslidden state is far from being agreeable, it is natural for one in it to want to be delivered from it. For that very reason, it is much to be feared that many have prematurely grasped at the promise of forgiveness, and said to their souls, “Peace, peace” when there was no peace. As there are many ways by which a convicted sinner seeks peace for his soul without finding it, so it is with a backslider. If he leans unto his own understanding, follows the devices of his own heart, or avails himself of the remedies advertised by religious quacks, he will rather be worsened than improved. Unless he complies with the injunctions laid down in the Word of Truth—for such cases and meets the requirements therein specified—there can be no real recovery for him. Alas, that this is so little realised today; and that so many who went astray and think they are returned unto the Bishop of their souls are labouring under a delusion.

If there is to be a real recovery, it is requisite that the right means be used, and not that which is destructive of what is desired. When trees grow old or begin to decay, it is useful to dig about them and manure them—for often, that will cause them to flourish again and abound in fruit. But if instead of so doing, we removed them out of their soil and planted them in another, so far from that advantaging them, they would wither and die. Yet, there are many professing saints who suppose that the decay of grace does not arise from themselves and the evil of their hearts, but rather, attribute the same unto uncongenial surroundings, unfavourable circumstances, their present occasion, or station in life; and they persuade themselves that as soon as they be freed from those, they will return to their “first love,” and again delight themselves in spiritual things. But that is a false notion and spiritual delusion. Let men’s circumstances and stations of life be what they will. The truth is that all their departures from God proceed from an evil heart of unbelief, as is clear from Hebrews 3:13. Do not deceive and flatter yourself, then, with the idea that what is needed for a recovery from your spiritual decline is but a removal into more favourable and congenial circumstances.

As it is from want of watchfulness—and because of the allowance of sin that all decays proceed—so it is a return unto unsparing mortification of our lusts, with all the duties that lead thereunto, must be the way of recovery. Yet at this point, too, we need to be much on our guard, lest we substitute for the denyings of self which God has enjoined, those pharisaical or papistical inventions which are of no value. Under the name and pretence of the means and duties of mortification, men have devised and enjoined a number of works, ways, and duties, which God never appointed or approved, nor will He accept; but will rather ask, “Who hath required *this* at your hand?” (Isa 1:12). Self-imposed abstinences and austerities may “have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body” (Col 2:23), but they will not profit the soul one iota. Unless those who are weighted down with a sense of guilt conduct themselves by the light of the Gospel, they will think to placate the displeasure of God by taking themselves to an unusual course of severities, which *He* has nowhere commanded. No abstinence from lawful things will deliver us from the consequences of having indulged in unlawful ones.

Again, the one who is exercised over the distressed by his spiritual decline is very liable to be wrongly counseled, if he turns to his fellow-Christians for advice and help. It is to be feared that in this day, there are few even among the people of God who are qualified to be of real assistance unto others. In most instances, their own spirituality is at such a low ebb, that if they be turned unto for relief, they will only be found to be “physicians of no value” (Job 13:4). And if they consulted the average preacher or pastor, the result is not likely to prove much better. Of old, Jehovah complained of the unfaithful priests of Israel, “They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people *slightly*, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14). There are not a few such today. If one who was mourning over having left his “first love” asked them the way of return thereto, instead of probing the conscience to ascertain the root of the “hurt,” they would endeavour to quieten his fears and soothe him; instead of faithfully warning him of the seriousness of his case, they would say there was nothing to be unduly exercised over, that perfection is not attainable in this life; and instead of naming the means God has appointed, they would tell him to continue attending the services regularly and contributing liberally to the cause, and all would be well. Many a wound has been skinned over without being cured.

“When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could *he* not heal you, nor cure you of your wound” (Hos 5:13). The historical reference is to Israel and Judah when in great danger from the pressure of enemies, instead of humbling themselves before God and seeking His help, they betook themselves unto a neighbouring nation, and looked to it for protection—yet, to no avail. But it has a spiritual application unto those who are conscious of their spiritual decline, but who turn to the wrong quarter for deliverance. Backsliders are often aware of their wretched plight, but perceive not that sin is the cause of it, and God alone can heal their backsliding (Hos 14:4). When His chastening rod falls upon them, so far from recognising that it is *His* mighty hand correcting them, that it is His *righteous* hand dealing with them, they imagine it is only “circumstances” which are against them, and turn to the creature to extricate them—but to no good effect. Since there has been a departure from God, there must be a return to Him—and in that way He has appointed—or there can be no recovery from the evil consequences of that departure.

We turn now to consider the *possibility* of recovery. It may appear strange to some of our readers that we should deem it necessary to mention such a thing, still more so that we should discuss it in some detail. If so, surely they forget that since Satan succeeds in persuading many a convicted sinner that his case is hopeless, that he has carried his rebellion against God to such lengths as to be beyond the reach of mercy, driving him into a state of abject despair; it should not be thought strange that he will employ the same tactics with a backslidden saint—assuring him that he has sinned against such favours, privileges, and light, and that his case is now hopeless. Those who have read the history of John Bunyan (1620-1677)—and his case is far from being unique—and learned of his lying so long in the slough of despond, when the devil made him believe he had committed the unpardonable sin, should not be surprised to learn that he is still plying the same trade and persuading one and another that he has so far departed from the Lord that his recovery is impossible.

But we do not have to go outside the Scriptures to find saints not only in a state of despondency and dejection before God, but in actual despair of again enjoying His favour. Take the case of Job. True, there were times when he could say, “For I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25), and “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). But his assurance was not always thus: There were also seasons when he exclaimed, “Mine hope hath he removed like a tree. He hath also kindled his wrath against me” (Job 19:10-11). True, he erred in his judgment; nevertheless, such was how he felt in the dark hour of trial. Take the case of Asaph: “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled” (Psa 77:2-3). Is not that an apt description of many a backslider, as he calls to mind the omniscience, the holiness, and the justice of God? But did he not find relief by reminding himself of God’s grace and loving-kindness? No, for he went on to ask, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his

mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" (Psa 77:7-10). That he should speak thus was indeed his infirmity—yet, it shows into what despondency a saint may fall.

Consider the case of Jeremiah. Said he, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath...Surely against me is he turned;...He hath set me in dark places...He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer...He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood...And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace:...And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD" (Lam 3:1-18). Is not that the language of despair! It was not only that his hope was weak and wavering, but he felt it had "perished," and that "from the LORD"! Lower than that, one cannot get. He had no expectation of deliverance; he saw no possibility of being recovered from his wretched condition. And think you my reader there are no Christians in such a sad plight today? If so, ask yourself, "Why has God placed on permanent record such groanings of His people when they occupied the dungeons of despair?" The time may come when such language will exactly suit *your* case; and if so, you will be very glad to hear that there *is* a possibility of deliverance, a door of hope opened in the valley of Achor.

There can be little room for doubt that the chief reason why so many professors today see no need for pointing out *that it is possible* for a backslidden Christian to be restored is because of the defective teaching they sit under. They hold such light views of the sinfulness of sin, they perceive so faintly the spirituality and strictness of God's Law, they have such a dim conception of His ineffable holiness that their consciences are comatosed; and hence, they are blind to their own state, and are unaware of what would be involved in delivering them out of it. They have had "Once saved, always saved," "My sheep shall never perish" dinned into their ears so often, they take it for granted that every backslider will be restored as a matter of course—i.e. without any deep exercises of heart on their part, or compliance with the requirements which God has laid down. Yea, there are extensive circles in Christendom today, where it is taught that "having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13) means "every trespass—past, present, and future;" and that, so far from the Christian asking God for daily forgiveness, he should rather thank Him for having already forgiven him. Of course, those who swallow such deadly poison require not to be informed that recovery from a relapse is possible.

But different far is it with one who lives in the fear of the Lord, whose conscience is tender, and who views sin in the light of divine holiness. When *he* is overtaken by a fault, he is cut to the quick, and should he so far decline as to leave his "first love" he will find a way of recovery by no means easy; and should he continue departing from God until his case become such that he has a name to live, but is dead, he may abandon hope entirely. When he seeks a return unto the Lord, it will be a case of "out of the depths have I cried unto thee" (Psa 130:1)—out of the depths of his heart, out of the depths of conviction, out of the depths of anguished contrition, out of the depths of despondency and despair. In his remarkable book on Psalm 130, John Owen (1616-1683), after pointing out that "gracious souls after much communion with God may be brought into inextricable depths and entanglements on the account of sin," went on to define those "depths" as: 1. Loss of the wanted sense of the love of God, which the soul did formerly enjoy. 2. Perplexed thoughtfulness about their great and wretched unkindness towards God. 3. A revived sense of justly deserved wrath. 4. Oppressing apprehension of temporal judgments."

But the eminent Puritan did not stop there. He went on to say, "There may be added hereunto, prevailing fears for a season of being utterly rejected by God, of being found a reprobate at the last day. Jonah seems to have concluded so: 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight' (Joh 2:4)—I am lost forever: God will own me no more. And Heman, 'I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand' (Psa 88:4-5). This may reach the soul, until the sorrows of Hell encompass and lay hold upon it: until it be despaired of comfort, peace, rest; until it be a terror to itself, and be ready to choose strangling rather than life. This may befall a gracious soul on the account of sin. But yet because this fights directly against the life of faith, God does not, unless it be in extraordinary cases, suffer it to lie long in this horrible pit, wherein there is no water—no refreshment. But this often falls out, that even the saints themselves are left for a season to a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, as to the prevailing apprehension of their mind."

We can bear testimony that in our extensive reading, we have come across not merely a few isolated and exceptional cases of backslidden saints who had sunk into such depths of soul trouble, distress, and horror, but many such; and that in the course of our travels, we have personally met more than one or two who were in such darkness and anguish of heart that they had *no hope*, and no efforts of ours could dispel their gloom. Let that serve as a solemn warning unto those who at present are enjoying the light of God's countenance: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest *he* fall" (1Co 10:12)—fall into a state of unwatchfulness, and then into wickedness. Sin is

that “abominable thing” which God hates (Jer 44:4), whether it be found in the unregenerate or the regenerate. If we trifle with temptation, then, we shall be made to taste what an exceeding bitter thing it is to depart from the living God. If we enter the paths of unrighteousness, we shall obtain personal proof that “the way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 13:15). And the higher have been our privileges and attainments, the more painful will be the effects from a fall.

But thank God the recovery of a backslider *is possible*, no matter how heinous or long protracted it was. The cases of David, of Jonah, of Peter demonstrate that! “No man that is fallen under spiritual decays has any reason to say, there is no hope, provided he take the right way of recovery. If every step that is lost in the way to heaven should be irrecoverable, woe would be unto us: We should all assuredly perish. If there were no reparation of our breaches, no healing of our decays, no salvation but for those who are always progressive in grace; if God should mark all that is done amiss, as the Psalmist spake, ‘O Lord, who shall stand?’ (Psa 130:3). Nay, if we had not recoveries every day, we should go off with a perpetual backsliding. But then, as was said, it is required that the right means of it be used” (J. Owen). What those right means consist of—and the very real difficulties which attend the use of them by those who have openly departed from God—must be left for consideration (D.V.) to our next.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9b. Its Reception

In our last, we sought to show that the words, “be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) are not an exhortation unto saints to acquiesce in the divine providences, or to render submission to His discipline and ordinances—but instead, that they form part of an account which the apostle was giving of his evangelical commission, of what his message was to men at large—and therefore, those words express the call which the Gospel makes to the unsaved. Before turning from that verse, let us point out that there is an expression in it which supplies an incidental, yet very real and strong, confirmation of what has been frequently insisted upon in this series. Again and again, we have pointed out that in connection with reconciliation, God is viewed specifically in His *official* and governmental (rather than in His essential or paternal) character, as Rector, or Judge. In full accord therewith, His servants are here referred to as “*ambassadors* for Christ, as though God did beseech”! (2Co 5:20)—in no other connection are ministers of the Gospel so designated!

After all that was pointed out under our fourth main division (its Arrangement), when we dwelt at length on the glorious provision of the Everlasting Covenant, and all that was brought forward under our fifth division (its Effectuation), when we showed how Christ carried out all He had engaged Himself to do under that Covenant, and the reward He earned—a “seed” for the travail of His soul—it might be thought that the elect were absolved and reconciled to God the moment the Saviour triumphantly cried, “It is finished” (Joh 19:30). But not so. As Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) pointed out, “We must distinguish between reconciliation *designed* by God, *obtained* by Christ, *offered* by the Gospel, and *received* by the soul.” It is through failing to recognise and bear in mind those very real and necessary distinctions that we confuse ourselves, confounding what should be kept separate. It was their failure to distinguish between totally different aspects of the Truth, which led some Arminians into teaching the gross error that the entire human race was reconciled to God by Jesus Christ—though most of them know it not.

For the purpose of simplification, the fourfold distinction drawn by S. Charnock may be reduced unto a twofold one: A reconciliation, which, in the language of the lawyers, is *de jure*, and one which is *de facto*—or in theological terms, the *impetration* or purchase of reconciliation by Christ and the *application* of it to us, or our actual receiving of the same. This will be more intelligible to the average reader if we remind him of the difference between having a legal right *to* a thing and a right *in* it. Such is the case with a minor with reference to an inheritance. If but ten years old when his father died and willed an estate to him, as soon as the will was proved, he had a legal right to the estate—none else could claim it; but not until he reached his majority would he have a right in it, not until he was twenty-one could he enter into possession and enjoyment of it. The Holy Spirit uses that very figure in Galatians 4:1-7 when treating of dispensational differences of privilege under the old and new covenants.

It is by observing this fundamental distinction that we obviate a difficulty which a first reading of 2 Corinthians 5 might occasion. There we read, “God, who *hath* reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2Co 5:18); and then the call is made, “*be ye reconciled to God*” (2Co 5:20). But there is nothing whatever inconsistent between those two statements, or anything in them, which should puzzle us. Paul was not there essaying a systematic exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation, but instead, was giving *an account* of his evangelical ministry or message in connection therewith. As was shown in our last, by the quotation from Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), that “ministry” consists of two parts: A reconciliation wrought on God’s part, and a reconciliation on our part toward God—the latter being equally necessary as the former. It is necessary, because since the alienation exists on each side, both parties must set aside their enmity, before amity is possible. It is necessary in order to the enforcement of human responsibility. It is necessary for us to be reconciled to God, because that is what He requires of us, as the way He has *appointed*. But let us amplify that a little.

While a great deal has been written to show that in the transactions between the Father and the Mediator, God determined to take full satisfaction unto His *justice*—and therefore, ordained that His Son should be offered a sacrifice—much less has been written to demonstrate that the *holiness* of God required *we* must cease our revolt against Him, before He can be reconciled to us, or receive us into His favour. Yet, the one is as true, as important, as necessary, as essential as is the other. God is as jealous in the vindication and glorifying of one of His attributes, as He is of another; and therefore, if on the one hand, we read that Christ is set forth “a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness” and “that he might be *just*, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:25-26); on the other hand, we are told that He “Who hath saved us, and called us with an *holy* calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9), addressing us thus: “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [behaviour]” (1Pe 1:15).

In the wondrous and perfect salvation which God planned and provided for His people, infinite wisdom saw to it that each of His perfections should be owned and magnified, and if our presentation of the Gospel fails to exhibit that grand fact, it is defective and partial. It is “To the praise of the glory of his *grace*, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). It is “according to his *mercy* he saved us” (Titus 3:5). In order that the claims of His righteousness might be met, He “spared not his own Son” (Rom 8:32), abating not the least whit that justice demanded. Likewise, He is resolved that without “*holiness...no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb 12:14). If He would not that the cup of death pass from Christ at His so earnest entreaty, most certain it is that He will not recede one iota from the requirements of His holiness in receiving us into His friendship; and therefore, His inexorable demand is, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). For God to pardon those who persisted in their wicked ways would be to condone sin.

If there be a revolt in a kingdom, two things are required before peace can be restored and amity again prevail. The king must be willing to exercise clemency on a righteous basis, and his subjects must cease their rebellion and become obedient to his scepter. Orderly government would be reduced to a farce if a pardon was offered unto those who continued to oppose the throne. Now the King of kings has announced His willingness and readiness to pardon any rebel among men, but only on the condition that he first throw down the weapons of his warfare against Him (2Co 10:4-5). The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom 8:7); and obviously, that enmity must cease before we can be reconciled to Him. By nature and practice, we are “alienated and enemies” in our mind “by wicked works” (Col 1:21); and clearly, those works must be confessed and repented of, hated and abandoned, ere there can be peace between us and the thrice Holy One. Christ does not save us in our sins, but *from* our sins (Mat 1:21). “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid” (Gal 2:17).

In this chapter on what God requires from us in order to our reconciliation with God, Thomas Goodwin pointed out the following.

“1. For the preparing us to be reconciled, it is necessary that we be convinced that we are enemies to God, and that He accounts us such; and that so long as we remain in that estate, He is also an enemy to us, and can be no other. This what God in Christ hath done gives demonstration of. He would not save us upon Christ’s bare entreaty, but He would have satisfaction, and have Christ feel what it was to stand in the room of *sinners*. Yea, one end why God saved us by way of satisfaction to His justice was that sinners pardoned might, in what Christ suffered, see and thoroughly apprehend what sin had deserved. And is it not, then, requisite that they should at least lay to heart and be sensible of their own treason and rebellions, and that God and they are at odds? Traitors must be convicted and condemned, ere they are capable of a legal pardon, as sentence must be pronounced ere a legal appeal can be made.

It is so in man's courts, and it is so in God's proceedings also. Neither indeed will men be brought so to sue out for His favour and prize His love till then—for it was never heard any man did heartily sue to one for pardon and peace with whom he did not first apprehend himself at variance.

2. It is necessary also that men apprehend the danger of going on in this estate; for though one should know another and himself to be enemies, if he thought his enemy were either careless or weak, he would slight reconciliation with him, and though sought unto, would not seek it. He who is mentioned in Luke 14:31-32 was to sit down and consider if he were able to go out and meet his enemy, else he would never have sought conditions of peace. So the soul—until it apprehends and considers (finding God and itself enemies) what a sore enemy He is, and what a fearful thing it is to fall into His hands—will not, till then, care to seek out to Him.

3. If one apprehended God implacable, not inclinable to peace, or hard to be entreated, he would never come at Him neither. Thus David—when Saul and he were at odds—suborned Jonathan secretly to observe what mind Saul bare towards him; and when he found him, and bent to kill him (1Sa 20:33), David came not at him.

4. The soul comes to be persuaded better things of God, and things that accompany reconciliation, and conceives hope that reconciliation is to be *had*, and had *for it*. And therefore, in all whom God means to reconcile to Himself, after He hath humbled them, He fixeth a secret persuasion on their hearts that He is ready to be reconciled to them—if they will be reconciled to Him. God gives them a secret hint of His intended good will to them. He reveals what a gracious God He is, and how freely He pardons...the same God, who, from everlasting, spake unto His Son and wooed Him for us, doth speak likewise secretly (inwardly) to a man's heart to allure and woo him to come in to Him" (T. Goodwin)—thereby overcoming his reluctance, quieting his fears, and making him willing in the day of His power. As He employs the Law to impart a knowledge of sin, to convict us of our high-handed rebellion against the Most High, so He uses the Gospel to make known the wondrous provision He has made both to satisfy the claims of His Law and to meet our deep need.

If it be asked, "Since Christ has satisfied every requirement of God, why are repentance and faith necessary from us?" What has been said above should furnish a sufficient and satisfactory answer. It is because God is pleased to exercise pardoning mercy in such a way as is suited to *all* His perfections. It would be contrary to His wisdom to dispense the precious benefits of Christ's atonement to impenitent rebels. It would be contrary unto His governmental honour for Him to cast pearls before swine, to be trampled beneath their feet. It would be contrary unto His holiness for Him to bestow pardon upon one whom He knew would abuse such a favour—as though He granted a dispensatory power for him to sin with impunity. As it is no reflection upon the sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction that believers are called to suffer afflictions and death—for they are not penal inflictions for the satisfying of His justice, but are sent for the exercising of their graces (1Pe 1:7); so it in no way derogates from the perfections of Christ's satisfaction that sinners be required to repent and believe, for there is nothing meritorious about such exercises.

Goodwin then went on to point out about the sinner...

"He must be set a-work to seek, as a condemned man, God and His favour in Christ, and peace and reconciliation through Him. He should pray to Him, and He will be gracious...God is the party superior, and it is fit the inferior should seek to the superior. He also is the person wronged, and though He be willing and desirous to be reconciled, yet He will have His favour prized. David longed to be reconciled to Absalom, yet he would be sought unto, for he would have his favour prized to the utmost and not cast away. Yea, and because the favour of God is better than life, he will be sought to with more earnestness and constancy than a man seeks for his life: 'And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart' (Jer 29:13). If God hath bidden us seek peace with men, yea, and to ensue it (Psa 34:14, 1Pe 3:11)—that is, though it fly away, yet follow it—much more are we, then, to seek peace with God Himself; and though He seem to reject us, yet to press upon Him—as David saith, 'my soul followeth hard after thee' (Psa 63:8).

"He will be sought unto with confession of and mourning for offending Him, for being in bitterness and mourning is joined with supplication for grace (Zec 12:10). This is necessary to reconciliation, because an acknowledgement is to be made (Jer 3:13). God would be sought humbly unto by us, as those that are traitors and rebels. God will have men know when He pardons, that he knows *what* He pardons, and therefore, will have them acknowledge what they deserve: 'That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God' (Rom 3:19). If a man will become wise, he must become a fool (1Co 3:18); so a man that will become a friend to God must turn enemy against himself and judge himself worthy of destruction (Eze 36:31)...Where mourning for offending God is wanting, there is no sign of any good will yet wrought in the heart to God nor love to Him, without which God will never accept of a man...God will not pardon till He sees hope of amendment. Now, until a man

confesses his sin—and that with bitterness—it is an evidence he loves it (Job 20:12-14). While he hides it, spares it, and forsakes it not, it is sweet in his mouth. A man will never leave sin till he finds bitterness in it.

“He must renounce all other friendships. The nature of reconciliation requires this—for friendship with anything else is enmity with God. ‘Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?’ (Jam 4:4). As God will not have us serve other masters, so neither other friends. ‘If any man come to me, and hate [forsake] not his father, and mother...’ etc., is unworthy of Me says Christ (Luk 14:26). A friendship not only with proclaimed enemies—open sins—but with all the things which the world hath is enmity with God. A believer may have a lordship over them, but not friendship with them. He may use them as strangers and servants, but not as friends so as they have his heart. Friendship is entered into by choice—kindred is not so. So Jonathan chose David to be his friend (1Sa 20:30). As God did choose you, so also must you choose Him. As God chooses you ‘freely’ (Hos 14:4), out of good will, so must you choose Him freely. As He chose you forever never to cast you off, so you are to choose Him forever. As nothing can separate from His love, so let nothing separate Him from yours.

“Let thy heart resign up itself and all that it hath, and devote it all unto God forever, to be commanded and used by Him. Thus did God for us: If He spared not His own Son, but with Him also freely gives us all things, let all you have be God’s—giving up yourselves first unto the Lord (2Co 8:5). Let God have all thy understanding, will, affections, and whatever else. And let all be His, to command in any thing as He pleases, and study how to set all a-work for Him. Likeness of disposition is the only sure and lasting foundation of friendship, being the soul of it—for it is impossible two should long be friends, unless they be one in their minds and affections, liking and loving the same things: ‘Can two walk together, except they be agreed?’ (Amos 3:3). Accordingly, a man that is thus reconciled must endeavour to walk and behave himself as a friend. The nature of reconciliation requires it: ‘A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly’ (Pro 18:24). Therefore, Christ said, ‘Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you’ (Joh 15:14). Watch over yourselves in all your ways, and be fearful to displease Him and His goodness (Hos 3:5).

“God designed to set forth His love so as to attain the ends of loving. It is not to give forth peace only, but to manifest good will and kindness, as Luke 2:14 shows. Yea, the ground of His showing mercy is His love (Eph 2:4). And although on our part, our love and friendship to God is not the ground of His, yet it *is* the end or *aim* of His. Though He did not love us because we loved Him first, yet He loved us that we might love Him in return. Therefore, in those He saves, if there were not wrought an inward principle of love and friendship, and good will mutual again to Him, that might answer His love to us, His love would not have its end, and would be finally cast away. For so we reckon love to be given away in loss when it is not answered in its kind—that is, with a true love in response. God would have His love valued and esteemed by those He saves, for love is the dearest thing that any one hath to bestow, because whoever hath a man’s love hath *all* he hath—for it commands all. If God’s love be esteemed by us, it will work holiness in us.”—*Thomas Goodwin (condensed and a few words altered)*.

We have quoted at such length from that excellent Puritan, because while Goodwin was a high Calvinist (a supralapsarian) and magnified the free and sovereign grace of God as few have done, yet he was also an able evangelist, a faithful shepherd of souls; and though he was a strict *particular*-redemptionist, yet he also enforced human responsibility; and while he taught clearly the total depravity and utter ruin of fallen man, yet he also shunned not to state plainly and emphatically what God required from the unsaved. We could easily reproduce the same, in substance, from John Owen (1616-1683), Thomas Manton (1628-1688), John Bunyan (1620-1677), and others of the seventeenth century. How far some in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries departed from their teaching, we leave the reader to determine, as he may also decide how solemn and serious—or how unimportant—such departure was: Whether the unsaved in many a so-called “place of truth” have been lulled to sleep by a fatalistic presentation of the doctrine of election and by harping so much on the creature’s inability to meet God’s requirements, or whether they have been faithfully exhorted to repent and believe the Gospel.

Should the reader say, “I mentally assent to most of what Goodwin wrote, but I find myself totally *unable* to comply with his directions,” we ask, “Cannot you see that such a statement greatly *aggravates* your wickedness?” Suppose I have grievously wronged and offended a dear friend of yours, and you came to me saying you deplored the breach between us, that your friend was willing to be friends again, if I would put matters right and beg forgiveness. Suppose you pleaded with me to do the proper thing, and the only reply I made you was, “I am *unable* to.” What would you think? Would you not justly conclude that all I lacked was a willing heart?—that the reason I would not seek unto the one I had injured was either because I *hated* him, or because I was *too proud* to humble myself before him? You would judge rightly! So it is with the sinner and God. If we analyse his “cannot,” it is be-

cause he is so wedded to his idols, so in love with sin, he *will not* forsake them. And anything in our preaching which comforts him in his “will not” is contrary to the Truth.

MARCH

THE CHRISTIAN OUTLOOK

The outlook of the natural man is bounded by the things of time and sense. Necessarily so: Being alienated from God and devoid of spiritual life, his interests are narrowed to this sphere, and where his treasure is, there will his heart be also. To “succeed” in this life, to obtain for himself a position of power and prestige in this perishing world, is as far as his ambitions go. To eat, drink, and be merry is the highest ideal of the vast majority of our fellows. Being of the world—as well as in it—the portion of the unregenerate I confined thereto. If his immediate portion be a disappointing one, he lives in hope of improving the same. And what is true of each of its units holds good of the whole: The world may not yet be the paradise they long for, yet they indulge in the wishful thinking that ere long a Golden Age will dawn.

There is much speculation and theorizing upon what is needed to usher in that Golden Age. Many have held that the only thing which obstructed it was some particular form of government, under which they lived: A government which confined the good things of this life to the privileged classes and withheld them from the labouring masses. In support of that theory, force has often been employed, ancient monarchies being overthrown, and republics taking their place. Every form of government that human wit could devise has been tried out: Absolute monarchy, limited monarchy, aristocratic rule, republicanism, democracy, communism—only to find that human nature remained unchanged and discontented as ever. More recently, it was said that Utopian conditions would eventually be reached by a natural process of evolution—that as civilization advanced, things would automatically improve. But such a chimera has been rudely shattered by the world tragedies of our own lifetime.

Others have pinned their faith to what is generally thought of as somewhat vaguely called “Religion.” Its leaders and advocates have felt that the world is suffering from something more serious and radical than surface disorders, and therefore, that the remedy must deal with what is wrong within. They realise that it is sin which lies at the root of the world’s miseries and sufferings, and they aver that religion is the only power which can overcome sin. There are, however, even more brands of religion than there are political philosophies, each one claiming to be the best, if not the only, panacea for all the world’s ailments. The devotees of each of these types of religion hold to the idea that if only a sufficient number of their fellows can be induced to endorse their particular creed and adopt their mode of life, there would soon be a vast improvement—that selfishness and injustice would be replaced by righteousness, that wars and wretchedness would give way to peace and happiness.

But the Christian outlook is entirely different from that of either the profane or the religious worldling. Having had his eyes opened to see his own native depravity and made to feel the plague of his own heart, he is under no delusion concerning the state of his fellows. He knows from painful experience that the disease from which his fellows are suffering is far too desperate for any human means to alleviate—still less, to cure—and that priests and Levites are of no avail for the half-dead traveler on life’s highway. He realises that all mankind lie under the curse of a holy and sin-hating God, and therefore, that “destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known” (Rom 3:16-17). If his thoughts be regulated by the Word of Truth, he knows that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19), and therefore, that the Ethiopian will sooner change his skin, or the leopard his spots, than that it should be capable of any change for the better.

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2Pe 3:13). *There* is “The Christian outlook”! That “Nevertheless” is in view of what is stated in the pre-

ceding verses. There, we are told that “the heavens [the stellar and atmospheric heavens] shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pe 3:10, and partly repeated in verse 12). We do not propose to now cross swords with either those who deny, or affirm, there is yet to be a “Millennium” (on that subject, the writer has no definite opinion); rather do we here call attention to the divinely-revealed fact that at the close of human history—and in our judgment, no one on earth has or can have even an approximate idea of when that will be—this earth, and all its works, is going to be (not renovated nor purified, but) totally and finally destroyed. *That* will be the end of all the much-vaunted and admired productions of man.

But though the whole of this scene is doomed to destruction, so far from being dismayed and overwhelmed by such a prospect, Christians direct their gaze to something beyond and yet future, and “according to his promise, look for *new* heavens and a *new* earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2Pe 3:13). The poor worldling has nought better than his own wishful thinking on which to base his hope of a coming Golden Age. The Christian, who not only knows that this world is going to perish when it has served its Maker’s purpose, but has the definite promise of One who cannot lie that the present mundane system is going to be replaced by a new earth (which will endure not merely for a thousand years, but forever), in which sin shall never enter, but wherein righteousness shall dwell—and as the result thereof, where everlasting peace, blessing, and felicity shall obtain.

“We—whose eyes have been anointed with divine salve and whose hearts rest upon the infallible Word of God (in such passages as Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)—look—with a spiritual vision—for new heavens and a new earth.” We look with the eyes of *faith*, which are able to see Objects invisible to physical sight (Heb 11:27) and behold things whose actualization lies in the future, rather than in the present (Heb 11:1). We look with the eyes of *hope*—not of a mere wishful expectation, but of a confident anticipation of what God will surely bring to pass. We look with the eyes of happiness, as Abraham looked forward to the day of Christ, “saw it, and was glad” (Joh 8:56). We look with the eyes of *contentment*—for the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness will satisfy every holy longing and be the summum bonum of all pure desire. Yes, we look beyond the bounds of time to the glorious horizon of eternity.

As the unregenerate behold with horror the devastated cities of Europe and the rubble of what was not long ago its most venerated monuments (and the child of God cannot contemplate such ruins unmoved), as they look with faltering hearts after those things which they very much fear are soon to come upon the earth; as we are now witnessing the demolishing of Dagon—what man has termed “our Christian civilization”—the eye of faith looks for that which the Lord God shall yet call into existence, which will witness the consummation of His purpose and be the grand finale of redemption. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2Pe 3:14)—*that* is the practical application. O that grace may be granted both writer and reader to heed it.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

27. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 3

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19). What a prayer is this! As it was an apostle, one who in some respects was the most highly favoured of the apostles who made those petitions, so it requires one with his deep spiritual experience to open unto us the sublime contents of them. Far more than strength of intellect, or even exegetical skill, is required in opening up such a portion of the Scriptures as this—namely, spirituality of mind, elevation of heart, the soul in close communion with God. In proportion as the expositor realises that, will he be conscious of his own unfitness for such a task. Yet, since it pleases God to employ the most unlikely and unworthy instruments to the praise of the glory of His grace, we can but cast ourselves upon Him and hope He will deign to make some use of our feeble pen.

“That he would grant you...to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). That is the first great need, alike of the writer and of the reader, and happy for us if we be truly aware thereof. As none—but the Spirit of God—could impart spiritual life unto our souls, so He alone can maintain that life. It is true that, for the most part, the Spirit works by our concurrence, or blessing unto us the means of grace, as we make proper use of the same; yet, it is also true that it is the Spirit who first works in us the desire and the diligence in using those means, and it is only by His gracious operations in subduing our native pride that we are preserved from being complacent with our diligence. We are entirely dependent upon Him to strengthen that gracious principle, which He communicated to us at the new birth for the exercise and employment of it. If it be true that, naturally, “in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Act 17:28), it is nonetheless so spiritually, even as Christians, that we may have a deeper realisation of that, and conduct ourselves accordingly.

Expositors differ as to exactly what we are to understand by “the inner man” (Eph 3:16)—whether the reference be only to “the new nature” or principle of grace and holiness, or whether it includes the soul with all its faculties. Personally, we would define it as the soul, so far as it is renewed by divine grace. The body, considered separately, is not the subject of moral good or evil—it is the soul which is the seat of all moral qualities. It is true that in many passages, indwelling sin or the principle of evil in fallen man is denominated “the flesh,” yet it must be borne in mind that the Scriptures speak of “the carnal *mind*” (Rom 8:7), and among its “works” or products, mentions “hatred, variance, emulations” (Gal 5:19-21), which are more than physical passions. When the apostle said, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22), he undoubtedly referred to the new nature within him, and when he added, “But I see [perceive] another law [or principle law of operation] in my members [the faculties of his soul], warring against the law of my mind” (Rom 7:22-23), he had in mind his native depravity.

Thus “the inner man” (Eph 3:16) signifies the soul, so far as it is renewed—for the principle of evil, or our original corruption, remains unchanged. That renewing consists of a supernatural enlightenment of the understanding, so that things are now viewed in God’s light; the spiritualizing of the affections, so that they are now drawn out unto new objects, and the heart is engaged with God; the freeing of the will from the dominion of sin, and the inclining of it unto holiness. In addition to that renewing and sublimating of the original faculties of the soul, there is communicated a new “spirit,” or principle of grace—a new life. Let it be recognised that what takes place at regeneration is but the *beginning* of God’s good work in the soul, and that the same work is “performed” or continued throughout the Christian life (Phi 1:6). We *are* “renewed” (Col 3:10), but there is also “the renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:5), for “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2Co 4:16); yea, the divine promise is: “I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day” (Isa 27:3).

That continual renewing is necessitated by the incessant opposition made by indwelling sin, ever seeking to possess and direct the faculties of our soul, and because the new nature received at the new birth is but a *creature*—entirely dependent upon its Author. It is, therefore, both the duty and the privilege of the believer to turn unto that Author for a daily quickening and energizing, begging Him to strengthen him with might by His Spirit in the inner man, pleading His promise, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa 40:31), until he is enabled to say, “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD” (Mic 3:8). It is, then, the vitalizing of the soul as the dwellingplace and organ of the Holy Spirit: the soul in its entirety, including all its faculties—intellectual, emotional, moral. It is also a request for the invigorating of the graces of the new man “in all holy dispositions: in faith reverential fear, love, gratitude, hatred of sin, hope, patience, that we might be steadfast amid temptations and persecutions, enjoy comfort, and glorify God in every situation and duty” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

“In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst [*rahab*] me with strength [better ‘might’—*oz*] in my soul” (Psa 138:3). *There* is the verse of the Old Testament, which is parallel with the petition of Ephesians 3:16, and as the “strengthened [*krataioo*] with might [*dunamis*]” exactly corresponds with the two Hebrew words, so “the inner man” is defined as “my soul.” David was in sore straits—walking “in the midst of trouble,” encountering the wrath of his enemies (Psa 138:7), and conscious of his own insufficiency, God responded and afforded him relief by strengthening the faculties of his soul and animating the grace of his “new man.” The effect of that strengthening would be courage, fortitude, spiritual heroism. The Spirit can make the feeble mighty, the trembler brave, and the weary cheerful. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength” (Isa 40:29).

But we must now consider more closely the relation of this first petition unto what immediately follows. The apostle yearned for an increased measure of grace to be granted the saints and for their spiritual abilities to be enlarged—not in this instance with a view to the performance of the outward acts of obedience and duty, but that the believing soul might be empowered to enjoy its spiritual portion and privileges. He longed that Christians might be

more habituated to living by faith on Christ, so that He might be in them not by transient visits, but abide constantly in their thoughts and affections; and that thereby, they would be established in joy and abounding fruitfulness. He longed that they might not only have love, but be “rooted and grounded” (Eph 3:17) therein, so that their communion with Christ might be a steady experience, rather than an occasional luxury. But such is our native weakness for contemplating heavenly objects, that without continued grace preparing us thereunto, they would be altogether beyond our reach. We need the wind of Heaven to blow our barques forward.

That ye may be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16) is here a request for the communication of energizing enablement that we may be fully absorbed with Christ. As the Christian owes his new life or nature to the Spirit, so it is by His power alone, it can be vigorous and flourishing. It is only by His strengthening of the heart that we are delivered from being engrossed by the things around us, and our earth-bound affections are drawn unto things above. He it is who creates the desire for Christ, who shows us the things of Christ, who causes us to make Him the grand subject of our spiritual meditations. So, too, it is only by the supernatural quickening of the Spirit that we can be girded for that extraordinary effort of mind, if we are to be “able to comprehend...And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19). And beyond any peradventure, it is only by the operations and influences of the gracious Spirit that we may be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). And that quickening, enablement, and girding, we are to daily seek from Him.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17) is the second petition. We certainly do not agree with Charles Hodge (1797-1878) when he says on this verse: “The indwelling of Christ does not differ from what is expressed in the preceding verse, further than as indicating the source or nature of that spiritual strength of which that verse speaks. When Paul prayed that his readers might be strengthened in the inner man, he prayed that Christ might dwell in them.” It seems strange that one of his perspicuity should confound things that differ and reduce unto a single request what the apostle so distinctly made two separate petitions. But one error always involves another, and unsoundness in any doctrine necessarily issues in unsound exegesis of a verse which involves that doctrine. And that leads us to point out what we cannot but consider a serious mistake made by many excellent men on the doctrine of Christ’s indwelling of His people—namely, that He does so *only by proxy*—that Christ does not personally reside in His saints, but indwells them only by His Spirit.

Hodge went on to say: “Christ’s being in us means that we have His Spirit, and to have His Spirit means that the Spirit of God dwells in us. When, therefore, the apostle speaks of Christ dwelling in our hearts, he refers to the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, for Christ dwells in His people by His Spirit.” That is the view held by the majority of orthodox theologians—yet that, by no means, proves it to be Scriptural. “If Christ be in you the body is dead” (Rom 8:10), “know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate?” (2Co 13:5), “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20), “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). In view of those clear and repeated declarations, and in the absence of any statement in Holy Writ that “Christ...by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11), is it not the height of presumption for any man to aver that Christ does not personally indwell His people, but only resides in them by His deputy? Let no one rob us of the comfort of such promises as Matthew 18:20 and 28:20 by evacuating the “I” of its blessedness.

We readily grant that we are treating of a realm that is beyond the compass of any created mind, yet that does not warrant us in denying God’s Word. We freely admit that the God-man Mediator does not indwell the saints, for His humanity is localized in Heaven. But Christ is, essentially, a divine person, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit, and in becoming flesh, the Word lost none of His divine attributes. Omnipresence pertains as much to Him now as it did before He became incarnate, and as a divine person, He indwells His people as really and truly as do the other persons of the Godhead. God the Father dwells in His children: If 1 John 4:12-15 be read attentively, it will be seen that in that passage, “God” clearly has reference to the *Father*. The Holy Spirit dwells in the saint individually, and in the Church corporately: Romans 8:8, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and God the Son dwells in believers. When it was said, “God is in you of a truth” (1Co 14:25), it is to be understood of the Triune God.

Yet it is not only in the sense that He is omnipresent that Christ indwells His people. When we read, “Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jer 23:24), that refers alike to the omnipresence of each Person in the Godhead. But when we are told that the infinite God “dwellest in the heavens” (Psa 123:1), “among the children of Israel” (Num 35:34), “in Zion” (Psa 9:11), “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15), it signifies a particular appropriation, where He is specifically manifested. “Surely He that dwells as He is God, in common in all creatures, His person and Godhead may well be thought to dwell in us by a special appropriated habitation ‘over his own house; whose house are we,’ says the apostle in Hebrews 3:6; yea, and not only His own ‘house,’ but His ‘body’ also.” Pointedly did Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679) also ask, “Can Satan, because he is a

spirit, possess the bodies, and even the hearts of men; and cannot Christ, who as God is ‘Spirit’ (Joh 4:24), do the same?”

“What! Hath the addition of the manhood unto His person made that person, as He is God, incapable of dwelling in us immediately, as well as the person of the Spirit? Is He disprivileged thereby, whereas indeed by reason of His relation to us as God-man, it is that He doth dwell in us anyway? It has also seemed somewhat strange to me that He that is ordained to be the means of our union with God, and is the prime object and *terminus* of our union, the designed Bridgroom that is to be married, the person to be in conjunction with us: ‘That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us’ (Joh 17:21-23): That He also is the person in whom, and by whom, the union is effected with Himself and the other two Persons, and is the Person most concerned in this matter of union, that Himself should be married and come to be in His nearest conjunction with us only by a proxy, namely, by the Holy Spirit, and Him to be sent into our hearts only to dwell in His stead—that were indeed strange” (T. Goodwin).

Having sought to clear away this stumbling-stone concerning Christ’s indwelling His people, we must consider more closely the meaning of our petition. That Christ personally and immediately inhabits His people is a blessed fact, and therefore, there is no need to make request for the same. But over and above that, the apostle here prayed, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17), by which we understand him to mean that by spiritual meditations upon and loving contemplations of His complex person, His glorious titles, His mediatorial offices, His precious promises, His wise precepts, He may have a constant place—the supreme place—in our thoughts and in our affections. That for which the apostle prayed was that the saints might have a spiritual sight of Christ, a spiritual knowledge of Him, a spiritual enjoyment of Him, so that He is *present* and precious to the soul; and that can only be by the exercise of faith upon Him, as He is revealed in the Scriptures. It is for the heart to be affected with the excellency of His person, with His love and grace, with His blood and righteousness.

It is an *objective* dwelling of Christ in the heart, which our text refers to—as the subjects which engage our thoughts obtain a dwelling-place in our minds, and as the objects of our love secure a place in our affections. As the eye beholds an object, an image of it is introduced and impressed upon the mind; and as the eye of the spirit—faith—is engaged with Christ, an image of Him is formed on the heart. The sun is stationed in the heavens, yet when we gaze upon it steadily, an image of it is formed upon the retina of the eye. As by opening the door or the window, the sun shines directly into our rooms, so by the exercise of faith upon Him, Christ obtains a real presence in our hearts. Christ is the grant Object of faith; and faith is the faculty whereby we—through the light of the Word and the power of the Spirit—receive and take into our renewed minds the knowledge of His person and perfections. Thereby, He is admitted into our hearts, and we have real communion with Him.

As the fancy or that faculty of the mind by which it records and represents *making to appear* past images or impressions, forming a picture of them in the mind is an aid to our natural knowledge in the understanding of natural things; much more so does faith help our spiritual knowledge of divine things—giving a real subsistence to them in the soul. The beholding of Christ is not by way of fancy, but by faith giving a subsistence to Him, so that the heart finds a reality of what it believes; yea, it has so great an influence and leaves such an impression that it changes the heart into the same image (2Co 3:18). Faith, by the Spirit, makes Christ a living actuality. Moreover, faith produces love, and then worketh by it, so that the object of faith is sealed upon the heart. As Christ was received by faith at first, so by the same principle of faith, we continue to receive out of His fulness, to feed upon Him and to commune with Him. And as the mind is exercised with believing meditations upon Christ, we give Him entertainment in our hearts.

“That he would grant you...to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:16-17). Cannot the reader now perceive more clearly the relation between those two petitions? There is no exercise of faith upon Christ apart from, and except by, the operations of the gracious Spirit within the believer’s soul. Said the Lord Jesus, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). To “come” to Christ is the same as to “believe” on Him as verse 35 of the same chapter shows; and none can come or believe, unless his heart be drawn to Christ by the Father—and that “drawing” He does both personally and by the operations of His Spirit. True, John 6:44 has reference to our initial coming to or believing on Christ, yet we are equally dependent upon the Spirit for every subsequent exercise of faith. Thus, we read of “faith of the operation of God” (Col 2:12), and of Paul praying that God would “fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2Th 1:11)—i.e., His power. Thus, the principal effect of our being strengthened by the Spirit is that our hearts are drawn out unto Christ, and our faith is exercised upon Him.

As the Spirit is from Christ (Joh 15:26; Act 2:33), so the great mission of the Spirit is to direct souls to Christ (Joh 16:14-15). If He first convicts of sin, it is but to convince of our need of a Saviour. If He communicates to us a

new nature, it is that that new nature may be absorbed with Christ. If He strengthens us, it is in order that faith may act upon Christ. As the Spirit never acts but in and through Christ with respect to His people, so Christ is never received but by and with the influences of the Spirit. They are as undivided in Their operations, as in Their essence. A man cannot truly believe in Christ but by the power of the Holy Spirit, nor can a man have the Spirit who does not truly believe in Christ. There is a reciprocity in the two divine offices which illustrate and magnifies Both, and for which respecting the divine glory, They were covenanted and undertook. Christ is the Fountain of life, and the Holy Spirit is the Water of life. From that Fountain (Abrose Serle “*Horae Solitariae*”), and His watering of the soul is to fit it to act faith on Christ.

It is far too little realised by the majority of Christians that they are just as wholly dependent upon the gracious operations of the Spirit within them as they are upon the meritorious righteousness of Christ without them; and therefore, they need to seek unto God and count upon the enablings of the Former as definitely and as constantly as they trust in and rely upon the finished work of the Latter. As they are completely devoid of anything to commend themselves unto the notice of the Lord, so they are equally without any power of their own to serve and glorify Him, now that He has deigned to look upon and recover them from their lost estate. It is because of their helplessness that He has bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them—to maintain life in their souls and to draw forth that life into suitable exercise and action. Yet, it is both our privilege and duty to concur therein: Recognizing our dependency on His agency, avoiding those things which grieve Him, and seeking His daily renewings. “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:19)—a fresh supply of the Spirit comes to us in response to prayer!

Until he has learned his dependency upon the Spirit’s workings within him, until he personally realises his urgent need of “a fresh supply of the Spirit”—and being daily renewed by Him—the Christian will not, and cannot, make any true spiritual progress: Faith upon Christ will not be operative, love for Him will not be warm and regular, communion with Him will not be enjoyed. That is why this request for the saints to be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man precedes the other petitions. Christ has an objective and influential dwelling in our hearts, only as faith is kept in exercise upon Him and as our affections are set upon Him. As Christ was received by faith at first, so it is by the same faith we delight ourselves in Him, feed upon Him, have fellowship with Him, and draw from His fulness. But our faith is exercised by us, only in proportion as we are first strengthened within by the Spirit. Faith is indeed an act of *ours*, yet it does not act by or from anything *of ours*—but only as it is stirred into action by the Spirit.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

7. His Commission (1:7-9)

We turn now to the closing portion of the great commission which Joshua received from the Lord. We have already seen that it came to him after the death of Moses, and that it was concerned with Israel’s conquest and occupation of the land of Canaan (Jos 1:1-4). We have contemplated the blessed assurances which Jehovah gave unto His servant, for the comforting of his heart and the strengthening of his hands (Jos 1:5). We have pondered the general injunction which God laid upon the new leader of His people (Jos 1:6), and sought to show its meaning and timeliness. We have also noted the particular application which the Lord made of that injunction unto Joshua, in requiring that he should be very courageous in regulating all his actions by the statutes He had given through Moses, and placed on permanent record as an authoritative Rule for all who should succeed him; and how that He enjoined implicit and undeviating obedience from him (Jos 1:7), and endeavoured to indicate the very real and practical bearing all of that has upon our spiritual lives today. In what we are now to ponder, we learn what more was demanded of Joshua in order to ensure a successful realisation of all the foregoing.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8). Joshua was to be guided and governed wholly by the written Word, which was something unprecedented, unique. No man before Joshua had received orders from God to regulate his conduct by the Words of a *Book*. True, Abram and his household obeyed God’s voice in keeping His commandments and

His statutes (Gen 26:5). Moses, too, had acted by divine authority, but each had received his instructions from the mouth of the Lord. But Joshua, and all who succeeded him, must be governed by “this book of the law” (Jos 1:8). It is remarkable that Joshua and the Book come before us together without any introduction in the same passage: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua” (Exo 17:14)—the Book was prepared for Joshua; Joshua came to fulfill the words of the Book. The typical significance of that is at once apparent.

Let it be carefully noted that God’s Word, from its very first appearance as a book, occupies the same position—namely, the position of unqualified *supremacy*. It was set above Joshua: All his actions were to be regulated by it. Let us also observe that the authority of this Book is quite independent of its quantity or size. “The law of Moses,” “Moses, and in the prophets,” “The law...the prophets, and in the psalms” (Luk 24:44) are descriptions of the same Book, differing in the quantity of its matter, but not differing in its authority, nor in its relation to the people of God. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy” (Rev 1:3) is a declaration that applies with equal force to the Holy Scriptures in every stage of their compilation, from the opening chapters of “The Book of the Law” till the completion of the Sacred Canon. Let us further remark that in this first title given to the Bible in its earliest form, we have emphasised its leading characteristic: It contains more than good advice or salutary counsel—it is a “Law” binding upon us, a Law clothed with divine authority, a Rule for us to walk by.

“This Book of the Law” comprised the entire Pentateuch, the first five books (or chapters) of the Old Testament. It is not “these books of the Law,” for all through the Old Testament, those five books are regarded as a unit. Now, it is very rare indeed that we turn aside and pay any attention to the ravings of sceptics and infidels, but on this occasion, we will depart from our custom. It is one of the many erroneous allegations of the self-styled “Higher Critics” that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but was composed at a very much later date—some say, in the time of king Manasseh; others, not until the days of Ezra. But over against this assertion stands the fact that a definite “Book” is spoken of all through the Old Testament as being constantly appealed to, with directions how it was to be preserved; and it should be of interest to our readers if we briefly outline the references to the same. The first mention of this “Book” is as stated above, in Exodus 17:14; and there, we see it was written by Jehovah’s command, and (in the Hebrew) is designated “*the Book*.”

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD...And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people” (Exo 24:4, 7) tells who was its first penman. “And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD” (Num 33:2); and if we compare Deuteronomy 1:2, 3 and 2:14, it will be found that those “journeys” were from the early part of the first year after Israel came out of Egypt, until the end of the thirty-eighth. “And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi” (Deu 31:9) entrusting it to their custody, and verse 26 of the same chapter informs us he bade the Levites, “Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee” (Deu 31:26). It is clear from verse 19 that copies were made of parts of it at least, but the standard copy was preserved in the side of the ark, which vessel was kept in the holy of holies. From that Standard copy, each king of Israel was required to “write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites” (Deu 17:18).

Once every seven years, the whole of the Book of the Law was to be read in the hearing of the entire congregation. “And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing...that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law” (Deu 31:10-13). This was the Book by which Joshua was to be regulated. At a later date, the Spirit moved him to write therein (Jos 24:26), as Samuel also added portions thereto (1Sa 10:25). It was *this* Book that David had in mind when he prayed “teach me thy statutes,” “order my steps in thy word” (Psa 119:12, 133). When David drew nigh unto death, he gave this commission unto Solomon: “And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments...as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest” (1Ki 2:3).

Alas, Solomon failed to heed that injunction, following too much the evil devices of his heart. The decline which began in his reign accelerated and continued many generations, and during that time, “this book of the law” was lost to the people. In the days of Josiah, the high priest “found the book of the law in the house of the LORD” (2Ki 22:8), for *He* had guarded and preserved it despite Israel’s apostasy; and the godly king himself read “all the words of the book of the covenant” in the hearing of a vast assembly (2Ki 23:2-3). Later, we find Ezra doing the same thing (Neh 8:1, 8; 13:1). Daniel made reference to this Book: “The curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him” (Dan 9:11). While the very

last chapter of the Old Testament contains this injunction, “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (Mal 4:4); which completes the cycle.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth” (Jos 1:8). No man—however dignified his position—is above the Law of God. Though exalted to be commander-in-chief over Israel, and thereby given great power and authority, Joshua himself must be in subjection to the divine Law: He was to issue no orders, save those which were authorised by the Rule given to him. He was to invent no new statutes or ordinances, but be regulated solely by what was “written.” If Joshua was to complete the work which Moses began, then he must maintain the Law which Moses had established. There was no need for him to make new laws: He was already furnished with a divine and complete Charter, and *that* it was his business to heed and enforce. “To the law and to the testimony” he was to be held accountable; and if he spake not according thereto, then there was no light in him (Isa 8:20), and those under him would be left in spiritual darkness. Just so far as he executed this commission, would the smile of God be upon him and prosperity attend his efforts.

“But thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein” (Jos 1:8). Meditation upon the Word of God is one of the most important of all the means of grace and growth in spirituality; yea, there can be no true progress in vital and practical godliness without it. Meditation on divine things is not optional, but obligatory—for it is something which God has *commanded us* to attend unto. The order which Joshua received was not restricted to himself, but is addressed to all of God’s people. Nor does it by any means, stand alone. “Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day” (Deu 32:46). “Ponder the path of thy feet” (Pro 4:26); “Consider your ways” (Hag 1:7). “Let these sayings sink down into your ears” (Luk 9:44), which they cannot do, unless they be frequently turned over in our minds. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely...*think on* these things” (Phi 4:8).

Meditating in God’s Law day and night is one of the outstanding marks of the man whom He calls “Blessed” (Psa 1:1-2). It is a holy art and habit commended in the practice and example of the saints: Isaac (Gen 24:63), David (Psa 119), the mother of our Lord (Luk 1:49-51). But though meditation be a duty and a great moral spiritual aid, it is practised by few. The usual plea proffered by those who neglect it is, “I am too busy, my life is so crowded with a multiplicity of duties and concerns, that, alas, I have not the necessary leisure for quiet ruminating.” Our first reply is, “Then you are acting in the energy of the flesh and suffering yourself to be little better than a slave.” God is no Egyptian taskmaster. Christ’s yoke is easy and *His* burden is light, and if *your* “burden” be heavy, it is a self-imposed one. God calls you to no manner of life which crowds out the needs of your soul and entails the neglect of your eternal interests. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2) is His unchanging call, and He has given no harsh and unreasonable precepts.

But this plea, “I am too busy to engage in regular and spiritual meditation” is an idle excuse; yea, it is worse—it is a *deceit* of your evil heart. It is not because you are short of time, but because you *lack a heart* for the things of God! “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat 6:21), and that which most occupies our heart will most engage the mind, for our thoughts always follow our affections; consequently, the smallest actions—when we have no delight in them—are tedious and burdensome. Is it not money which most absorbs the attention of the miser? The voluptuary thinks only of satisfying his senses. The giddy youth is concerned mainly with the pursuit of pleasure. The man of the world devotes his time and energies to acquiring wealth and honours. It is not lack of opportunity, but of relish for the Word and a desire to please God which lies at the root of our failure here. Said David, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psa 119:97)—he *evidenced* his love for God’s Law by constantly pondering it! To him, meditation was not a task, but a joy.

You may seek an extenuation by appealing to numerous obligations and heavy responsibilities, but it is invalid before God. You certainly do not hold a more important position than Joshua did, nor are your tasks more numerous and exacting. Well did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out, “If ever any man’s business might have excused him from meditation, and other acts of devotion, one would think Joshua’s might at this time. It was a great trust that was lodged in his hands: the conduct of it was sufficient to fill him if he had ten souls, and yet, he must find time and thoughts for meditation. Whatever affairs of this world we have on hand, we must not neglect the one thing needful.” We cannot expect the God of Truth to be with us if we neglect the Truth of God. Nor is reading it and hearing it preached sufficient. They produce but a transient effect upon us, but *meditating* on some portion of the Word, going over it again and again in our minds deepens the impression, fastens the truth on our memory, and sets our hearts and hands a-work.

But let us carefully observe that meditation was not enjoined upon Joshua in a general way, but with a specific design: “Thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that [in order that] thou mayest observe *to do* according to all that is written therein” (Jos 1:8). His mind was to be exercised upon God’s Word with a specific purpose and practical end: Not simply to rest in contemplation, but in order to be regulated by its precepts, through a serious inculcating of them upon his heart. Meditation was not to be an occasional luxury, but the regular discharge of a constant duty—“day and night”—and this in order to a prompter, fuller, and more acceptable obedience. God requires an intelligent, voluntary, and joyous obedience; and if we are really desirous of pleasing and glorifying Him, we shall not only familiarize ourselves with His Word, but habitually ponder how its holy precepts may best regulate all the details of our daily lives. “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways” (Psa 119:15)—the latter cannot properly be without the former.

It is easy to persuade ourselves we really desire that our lives may be well-pleasing to God, but what *evidence* can we produce that such a desire is genuine? That which is well-pleasing unto God is made known in His statutes: To what extent are our hearts and minds seriously engaged with them? It is by definitely recalling who is their Author that I am most likely to hold them in greater reverence and esteem, realise they are designed for my good, and bring my walk into fuller accord with them. It is only by repeated and prayerful meditation upon them that I shall perceive their spirituality and scope. For example, that the prohibition of any vice inculcates its opposite virtue—that the thing forbidden is not merely the overt act, but everything leading up to and stimulating the same. It is by meditating on the precepts we come to understand them, that our consciences are impressed by them, that our wills are moved to do them.

“My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Psa 119:48). The moving cause of David’s respect for the divine commandments was his *love* for them, and that produced two practical effects. First, a “lifting up of the hands,” which is an expression of varied significance; but here, it means to make a diligent application unto the keeping of them. “Without thee shall no man lift up his hand” (Gen 41:44)—attempt to do anything. “Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble” (Psa 10:12)—put forth Thine active power for their assistance. “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down” (Heb 12:12)—set them to vigorous use. It is, then, a figurative expression, which imports a serious and deliberate setting about upon a course of action. “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments” (Psa 119:48): I will apply myself diligently to the keeping of them; I will earnestly endeavour to put them into practice; such is my solemn resolution.

Second, and in order to the carrying out of that resolution, “I will *meditate* in thy statutes” (Psa 119:48). It is not enough to barely approve of them: They must also be performed—see James 1:22, 1 John 2:4. If we would seriously address ourselves to a course of obedience, then we must use much forethought and meditation. God’s chief complaint against Israel of old was, “My people doth not consider” (Isa 1:3). God’s statutes must be kept in mind, and what they require from us constantly pondered. The longer we hold the divine precept before the conscience, the more powerfully shall we be affected by it. We complain of our forgetfulness, but fail to take the right course to cure it: The Word is only fixed in our minds by turning it over and over in our thoughts. “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17): Grace does not act as a charm, but sets us a-work, and much care and labour is entailed in obtaining spiritual understanding—see Proverbs 2:1-5.

“For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8). Yes, “then”—but *only then*. We must comply with the required conditions. Walking in the path of God’s commandments alone ensures success in the spiritual warfare. God’s smile of approbation will not be upon us unless we walk as obedient children. Nor shall we possess our possessions and enjoy our heritage, except as we conduct ourselves by the divinely-given Rule. And in order to “observe *to do* according to *all* that is written therein,” then we must “meditate therein day and night”! The designed use of this exercise is to bring the heart to a greater detestation of sin, and a more diligent care to please God, and thereby, we promote both our temporal and eternal welfare. We have dwelt the longer on these verses, because they are of incalculable importance to the Christian life. If we would *prosper* as Joshua did, then we must *act* as he did!

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

11c. Its Recovery

Its difficulty. Though reviving and restoration be needful, desirable, and possible, yet it is by no means easy. We do not mean that any problem is presented unto God in connection with the recovery of one who has suffered a spiritual relapse, but that it is far from being a simple matter for a backslider to comply with His requirements in order thereto. That difficulty is at least threefold: There is a difficulty in realising the sadness of his case, a difficulty in putting forth a real desire for recovery, and a difficulty in meeting God's stipulations. Sin has a blinding effect, and the more one falls under its power, the less discernment will he possess. It is only in God's light that we can see light, and the further we depart from Him, the more we engulf ourselves in darkness. It is only as the bitter effects of sin begin to be tasted, that the erring one becomes conscious of his sorry condition. Others may perceive it, and in loving faithfulness, tell him about it; but in most instances, he is quite unaware of his decline, and such warnings have no weight with him. Of course, the degree of the decay of his grace will determine the measure in which the "and knowest not" of Revelation 3:17 applies to him.

But even where there be some realisation that all is not well with himself, it by no means follows that there is also a real anxiety to return unto his "first love" (Rev 2:4). To some extent, the conscience of such an one is comatose; and therefore, there is little sensibility of his condition, and still, less horror of it. Here, too, the natural adumbrates the spiritual. Have we not met with, or read, of those suffering from certain forms of sickness who lacked a desire to be healed? Certainly, there are not a few such in the religious world. If the reader dissents from such a statement, we ask him, "Why, then, did the great Physician of souls address Himself as He did to the one by the pool of Bethesda?" We are told that that man had suffered from an infirmity no less than thirty-eight years; yet the Saviour asked him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Joh 5:6)—are you really desirous to be? That question was neither meaningless, nor strange. The wretched are not always willing to be relieved. Some prefer to lie on a couch and be ministered to by friends than bestir themselves and perform their duties. Others become lethargic and indifferent, and are, as Scripture designates them, "at ease in Zion" (Amo 6:1)!

It is all too little realised among Christians that backsliding is a departing from God and a returning to the conditions they were in before conversion, and the further that departure be, the closer will become their approximation to the old manner of life. Observe the particular language used by David in his confession to God. First, he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray" (Psa 119:67); but later, as spiritual discernment increased following upon his recovery, and as he then more clearly perceived what had been involved in his sad lapse, he declared, "I have gone astray like a *lost* sheep" (Psa 119:176)—the state of God's elect in the days of their unregeneracy (Isa 53:6). True, the case of David was a more extreme form of backsliding than many; nevertheless, it is a solemn warning unto all of us of what may befall, if we have left our "first love" and return not promptly to it. And how clearly his experiences serve to illustrate the point we are here seeking to set before the reader. Ponder carefully what follows the account of David's grievous fall in 2 Samuel 11, and behold the spirit of blindness and insensibility which deliberate sinning casts upon a backslidden saint.

In view of 2 Samuel 12:15, it is clear that almost a whole year—possibly more—had elapsed between the time of David's fall and the Lord's sending of Nathan unto him. There is not a hint that David was broken-hearted before God during those months. The prophet addressed him in the form of a parable—intimation of his moral distance from God (Mat 13:10-13)! Yet, if David's conscience had been active before God, he would have easily understood the purport of that parable. But sin had darkened his judgment, and he recognised not the application of it unto himself. In such a state of spiritual deadness was David then in, that Nathan had to interpret his parable and say, "Thou art the man" (2Sa 12:7). Verily, he *had* "gone astray like a lost sheep" (Psa 119:176); and at that time, the state of his heart differed little from the unconverted. Later, when his eyes were again opened, and he was deeply convicted of his sins, he perceived that he had lapsed into a condition perilously close to and scarcely distinguishable from that of the unregenerate—for he cried, "*Create* in me a clean heart, O God; and *renew* a right spirit within me" (Psa 51:10).

Does the reader now grasp more easily our meaning when we speak of the *difficulty* of being recovered from a spiritual relapse?—the difficulty of one in that case becoming sensible of his woeful plight, and the realisation that he needs delivering from it? Sin darkens the understanding and renders the heart hard or insensible. As it is with the

unregenerate sinner, so it is become—to a greater or lesser extent; and in extreme cases, almost entirely—with the backslider. What is it that is the distinguishing mark of all who have never been born again? Not falling into gross and flagrant outward sin—for many of them are never guilty of that—but “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness [margin, “hardness” or “insensibility”] of their heart” (Eph 4:18). That is the divine diagnosis of all who are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1); and we have but to change “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18) to “severed from communion with God;” and that solemn description accurately depicts the inward state of the backslider, though until God begins to recover him, he will no more recognise his picture than David did when Nathan drew his.

It is much to be thankful for when a child of God becomes aware that he *is* in a spiritual decline, especially if he mourns over it. Such is rarely the case with an unregenerate professor, and never so on account of *inward* decay. A person who has always been weak and sickly knows not what it is to lack health and strength, for he never had experience of it; still less does one in the cemetery realise that he is totally devoid of life. But let one of robust constitution be laid upon a bed of sickness, and he is very definitely aware of the great change that has come over him. The reason why so many professing Christians are not troubled over any spiritual decline is because they never had any spiritual health; and therefore, it would be a waste of time to treat with such about a recovery. If you should speak of their departure from God and loss of communion with Him, you would seem unto them as Lot did unto his sons-in-law when he expostulated with them—as one that “mocked” or made sport with them (Gen 19:14), and would be laughed at for your pains. Never having experienced any love for Christ, it would be useless to urge them to return unto the same.

It is much to be feared. That is why these articles on spiritual decline and recovery—which are so much needed today by many of the saints—will be almost meaningless, and certainly wearisome, to some of our readers. The real Christian will not dismiss them lightly, but will rather seek to faithfully measure himself by them, searching himself before God, and being at some pains to ascertain the condition of his soul. But those who are content with a mere outward profession will see little in them either of importance or interest. Such as perceive neither evil, nor danger, in their present condition—supposing that all is well with them, because it is as good as it ever was—are the ones who most need to examine themselves as to whether the “root of the matter” (Job 19:28) was ever in them. And even those who *have* experienced something of “the power of godliness”—but through carelessness, are no longer making conscience of seeking to please the Lord in all things as they once did—are asleep in carnal security (which is hardly distinguishable from being dead in sin), if they be not exercised over their decline and anxious to be recovered from it.

The vast majority in Christendom today will acknowledge nothing as a decay *in themselves*. Rather are they like Ephraim: “Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not;” and hence, it is added, “they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this” (Hos 7:9-10). How is it with you, dear friend? Have *you* been able to maintain spiritual peace and joy in your soul?—for those are the inseparable fruits of a life of faith and an humble and daily walking with God. We mean not the fancies and imaginations of them, but the substance and reality—that peace which passeth all understanding and which “keeps” or “garrisons” the heart and mind; that joy which delights itself in the Lord and is “full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). Does that peace stay your mind upon God under trials and tribulations, or is it found wanting in the hour of testing? Is “the joy of the LORD...your strength” (Neh 8:10), so that it moves you to perform the duties of obedience with alacrity and pleasure?—or is it merely a fickle emotion which exerts no steady power for good upon your life? If you once enjoyed such peace and joy, but do so no longer, then you have suffered a spiritual decline.

Spirituality of mind and the exercise of a tender conscience in the performance of spiritual duties is another mark of health, for it is in those things grace is most requisite and operative. They are the very life of the new man, and the animating principle of all spiritual actions—and without which all our performances are but “dead works.” Our worship of God is but an empty show, a horrible mockery, if we draw nigh unto Him with our lips, while our hearts be far from Him. But to keep the mind in a spiritual frame in our approaches to the Lord, to bless Him with “all that is within us,” to keep our grace in vigorous exercise in all holy duties, is only possible while the health of the soul be maintained. Slothfulness, formality, weariness of the flesh, the business and cares of this life, the seductions and opposition of Satan, all contend against the Christian to frustrate him at that point; yet, the grace of God is sufficient if it be duly sought. If you constantly stirreth up yourself to take hold of God (Isa 64:7), if you habitually “set [your]...face unto the Lord God, to *seek* [Him] by prayer and supplications” (Dan 9:3), that is evidence of spiritual health; but if the contrary be now your experience, then you have suffered a spiritual decline.

If you realise that things are not as flourishing with you now—either inwardly or outwardly—as they were formerly, that is a hopeful sign; yet it must not be rested in. Suffer not your heart one moment to be content with

your present frame—for if you do, there will follow a more marked deterioration. Satan will tell you there is nothing yet for you to be worried about, that there will be time enough for that when you fall into some outward sin. But he lies, as Scripture says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jam 4:17). You know it is good that you should return unto God and confess to Him your failures—even though those failures be more of omission than commission—but if you refuse to, that in itself is “*sin*.” To be conscious of decline is the first step toward recovery, yet not sufficient in itself. There must also be a laying of it to heart, a sensibility of the evil of it, a mourning over it—“For godly sorrow worketh repentance” (2Co 7:10). Yet, neither is that sufficient: Godly sorrow is not repentance itself, but only a means thereto. Moaning and groaning over our complaints—spiritual or natural—may relieve our feelings, but they will effect no cure.

Sensible of our decays, exercised at heart over them, we must now comply with God’s requirements for recovery if healing is to be obtained. And here, too, we shall experience difficulty. There are those who persuade themselves that it would be no hard matter to recover themselves from a state of backsliding, that they could easily do so if occasion required. But that is an entirely false notion.

There are many who think getting saved is one of the simplest things imaginable, but they are woefully mistaken. If nothing more were required from the sinner than an intellectual assent to the Gospel, no miracle of grace would be required in order to induce that. But before a stout-hearted rebel against God will throw down the weapons of his warfare, before one who is in love with sin can hate it, before one who lived only to please self will deny self, the exceeding greatness of God’s power must work upon him (Eph 1:19). And so it is in restoration. If nothing more were required from the backslider than a lip acknowledgement of his offences and a return to external duties, no great difficulty would be experienced; but to meet the requirements of God for recovery is a very different matter.

Rightly did John Owen (1616-1683) affirm, “Recovery from backsliding is the hardest task in the Christian religion: one which few make either comfortable or honourable work of.” Yea, it is a task entirely beyond the capabilities of any Christian. We cannot recover ourselves, and none but the great Physician can heal our backslidings. It is the operations of the Spirit of Christ which is the effectual cause of the revival under decays of grace. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God that any wanderer is brought back. It is God who makes us sensible of our deadness, and who causes us to make application unto Him, “Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?” (Psa 85:6). And when that request has been granted, each of them will own with David, “*He restoreth my soul*” (Psa 23:3). Nevertheless, in this too, our responsibility has to be discharged, for at no point does God treat with us as though we were mere automatons. There are certain duties He sets before us in this connection, specific requirements which He makes upon us, and until we definitely and earnestly set ourselves to the performance of the same, we have no warrant to look for deliverance.

Though the Holy Spirit alone can effect the much-to-be-desired change in the withered and barren believer, yet God has appointed certain means which are subservient to that end; and if we neglect those means, then no wonder we have reason to complain and cry out, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously” (Isa 24:16); and therefore, an alteration for the better cannot reasonably be expected. If we entertain hope of an improvement in our condition while we neglect the appointed means, our expectations will certainly issue in a sorrowful disappointment. Unless we be thoroughly persuaded of that, we shall remain inert. While we cherish the idea that we can do nothing, and must fatalistically wait a sovereign reviving from God, we shall go on waiting. But if we realise what God requires of us, it will serve to deepen our desires after a reviving and stimulate us unto a compliance with those things which we must do, if He is to grant us showers of refreshment and a strengthening of those things in us which are ready to die. There has to be an asking, a seeking, a knocking, if the door of deliverance is to be opened unto us (Mat 7:7; Luk 11:9).

It was not an Arminian, but a high Calvinist (John Brine, 1703-1765, whose works received a most favourable review in the Gospel Standard of Oct. 1852) who wrote to God’s people two centuries ago: “Much labour and diligence are required unto this. It is not complaining of the sickly condition of our souls which will effect this cure: confession of our follies that have brought diseases upon us—though repeated ever so often—will avail nothing towards the removal of them. If we intend the recovery of our former health and vigour, we must *act* as well as complain and groan. We must keep at a distance from those persons and those snares which have drawn us into instances of folly, which have occasioned that disorder which is the matter of our complaint. Without this, we may multiply acknowledgements and expressions of concern for our past miscarriages to no purpose at all. It is very great folly to think of regaining our former strength, so long as we embrace and dally with those objects through whose evil influence we are fallen into a spiritual decline. It is not our bemoaning the pernicious effects of sin that

will prevent its baneful influence upon us for time to come, except we are determined to *forsake* that to which is owing our melancholy disorder.”

It is not nearly so simple to act on that counsel as many may imagine. Habits are not easily broken, nor objects relinquished which have obtained a powerful hold upon our affections. The natural man is wholly regulated and dominated by “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1Jo 2:16); and the only way in which their prevalency over a Christian is broken is by an unsparing *mortification* of those lusts. Just so soon as we become slack in denying self—or in governing our affections and passions—alluring objects draw us unto a dalliance with them, to the blighting of our spirituality; and recovery is impossible, until we abandon such evil charm-ers. But just so far as they have obtained a hold upon us will be the difficulty of breaking from them. Difficult it will be, because contrary to all our natural inclinations and pre-regenerate lives, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Mat 5:29). Christ did not teach that the mortifying of a favourite lust was a simple and painless matter.

As though His followers would be slow to take to heart that unpalatable injunction, the Lord Jesus went on to say, “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Mat 5:30).

As the “eye” is our most precious member, so (especially to a labouring man) the “right hand” is the most useful and valuable one. By that figurative language, Christ taught us that our dearest idol must be renounced, our bosom lust mortified. No matter how pleasing be the object which would beguile us, it must be denied. Such a task would prove as hard and painful as the cutting off of an hand—they had no anesthetics in those days! But if men are willing to have a gangrened limb amputated to save their lives, why should we shrink from painful sacrifices unto the saving of our souls. Heaven and Hell are involved by whether grace or our senses rule our souls: “You must not expect to enjoy the pleasures of earth and heaven too, and think to pass from Delilah’s lap into Abraham’s bosom” (Thomas Manton, 1628-1688). That which is demanded of the Christian is far from being child’s play.

Again, “‘We must do the first works’ (Rev 2:5) if we design a revival of our graces. This calls for humility and diligence, to both which our proud and slothful hearts are too much disinclined. We must be content to begin afresh, both to learn and practise, since through carelessness and sloth, we are gone backward in knowledge and practice too. It sometimes is with the saints, as with school boys who, by their negligence, are so far from improvement that they have almost forgotten the rudiments of a language, or an art they have begun to learn; in which case, it is necessary that they must make a new beginning: this suits not with pride, but unto it, they must submit. So the Christian sometimes has need of being taught again what are the first principles of the oracles of God when, for the time he has been in the school of Christ, his improvement ought to be such as would fit him for giving instruction to others in these plain and easy principles. But through negligence, he has let them slip, and he must content to pass through the very same lessons of conviction, sorrow, humiliation, and repentance he learned long since of the Holy Spirit: whatever we think of the matter, a revival cannot be without it” (J. Brine). It is that humbling of our pride which makes recovery so difficult to a backslider!

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9c. Its Reception

On this occasion, we propose to treat of the present aspect of our subject in connection with *the Covenant*. There is a pressing need for this today—for while on the one hand, most professing Christians are woefully ignorant about the Covenant, some others have been very faultily instructed therein. As on almost every other doctrinal and practical subject, the Puritans were much sounder than many of the outstanding Calvinists of the nineteenth century, for the sermons of the latter were sadly lacking in perspective. Those of men like Joseph Irons, and James Wells, were thoroughly lop-sided. While they rightly emphasised divine sovereignty, they remissly ignored human responsibility; while they had much to say about God’s grace, they had little to say about the demands of His holiness; while magnifying the finished work of Christ, they were silent upon what God required from sinners, before

the benefits of it were applied to them. They were very fond of quoting: “He *hath made* with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure” (2Sa 23:5); but they scarcely ever cited, and never expounded: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I *will make* an everlasting covenant with you” (Isa 55:3).

A covenant is a compact between two parties, wherein there is mutual stipulation and re-stipulation—the one promising certain benefits in return for the fulfilling of certain conditions by the other. Thus it was in the covenant or agreement entered into between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26:28-29) and between Jonathan and David (1Sa 20:16-17). God entered into covenant with Christ as the Head of the elect; and to that covenant, He attached the demand of repentance, faith, and obedience from them.

Let us first consider the passage we quoted above from Isaiah 55, and which is so much ignored by many Calvinists. That chapter opens with a most blessed Gospel invitation, though there are one or two things in it which have been both misunderstood and disregarded. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters” (Isa 55:1) has been restricted unto a spiritual thirst, as though the invitation is made only unto souls divinely quickened. That is an unwarrantable limitation. The Gospel call goes forth freely to all classes and conditions of men, addressing them simply as *sinners*—guilty, lost, needy sinners. Since they *are* sinners, they have no satisfying portion, yet they have a thirst for something more contenting—and hence, their quest for happiness. But since they are blinded by sin, they know not what that satisfying portion consists of, or where true happiness is found. They seek it, but seek it wrongly and in vain. Hence, the question is asked them, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isa 55:2). Thereby is the Gospel call enforced.

“Come ye to the waters”—which *can* quench your thirst and satisfy your heart—“and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat” (Isa 55:1). The Inviter is a generous Benefactor who makes no charge for His benefits and bars not of them must “buy.” That does not mean they must give something for those benefits and purchase them. But it does signify they must *part with* something, or otherwise the word “buy” would have no force. There are two things which the sinner must part with, if he would be a participant of the Gospel feast: He must abandon his idols, and he must renounce his own goodness or righteousness. That which Christ requires from the sinner is that he come to Him empty-handed. If, on the one hand, that means he must bring no price with him, nothing seeking to merit his acceptance; on the other hand, it also means he must drop the world, and no longer cherish and cling to those objects or pleasures in which hitherto he has sought to delight himself.

“Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). Three times over in that first verse is the word “come” used. It is the response which is required to the invitation made. It is a word calling for action, for voluntary action. It is a word, too, of clear yet necessary implication—one cannot come to a place without *leaving* another! The prodigal son had to quit the “far country” (Luk 15:13) in order to turn unto the Father’s house. The sinner must (in his affections and resolutions) turn his back upon the world, if he would embrace Christ. Twice is the word “buy” found in it, to emphasise the fact that it is a definite and personal transaction which is here in view; and as we have already pointed out, to denote that something must be relinquished or parted with—whatever stands in opposition to Christ as seeking to hold the sinner’s heart. While the “no money,” “without money and without price” stresses the truth that eternal life is not to be obtained by the works of the Law, but is a free gift—that we bring nothing with us to commend ourselves to God’s favourable regard, but come simply as poverty-stricken beggars.

“Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isa 55:2). Listen to the voice of Wisdom which pleads with you to waste no more of your money on that which ministers not to your spiritual and eternal needs and your efforts after what has no power to afford you real and lasting satisfaction. Appropriate unto yourselves the riches of divine grace, as they are spread before you in the Gospel; and let your soul delight itself in that which will bring no disappointment with it, or regrets afterward. “Incline your ear, and come unto me” (Isa 55:3). Too long have you hearkened to the sirens of your lusts and to the false promises of this world. Too long have you been deaf to My counsels and precepts, to My expostulations and warnings. Incline your ear “as you do to that which you find yourselves concerned in, and pleased with; bow the ear, and let the proud heart stoop to the humbling methods of the Gospel; bend the ear this way that you may hear with attention” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). “Hear”—that is, heed, respond, obey, comply with My demands: “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; *and* I will make an everlasting covenant with *you*” (Isa 55:3).

Here, then, we learn plainly and definitely who are the characters with whom God proposes to make an everlasting covenant, and the terms with which they must comply if He is to do so. They are those who have freely sampled the lying vanities of this world, and like the poor prodigal, have found them to be naught but “husks.” They are those who hitherto had closed their ears against Him, refusing to meet His requirements and steeling

themselves against His admonitions. “Incline your ear” signifies cease your rebellious attitude, submit yourselves to My righteous demand. They are those who are separated and alienated from the Holy One, at a guilty distance from Him—away in “a far country” (Luk 15:13). “Come unto me” means, throw down the weapons of your warfare and cast yourselves upon My mercy. They are those who are unquickened, destitute of spiritual life: As the “hear, and your soul *shall live*” clearly shows. Comply with those terms, says God, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. It is human responsibility which is there being enforced. It is but another way of saying to sinners, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20).

As we pointed out in an article in November (Issue 38), this enforcing of man’s responsibility is most meet for the honour of God; and as the honour of the Father lies nearer to the heart of Christ than anything else, He will not dispense the benefits of His atonement, except in that way which is most becoming to God’s perfections. There is a complete accord between Christ’s impetration of God’s favour and the application of it—that is, between Christ’s purchase of it and our actual entrance into the same. As the justice of God deemed it meet that His wrath should be appeased, and his law vindicated by the satisfaction made by His Son, so His wisdom determined, and His holiness ordered it, that the sinner must be converted, before pardon be bestowed upon him (Act 3:19). We must be on our guard here, as everywhere, against extolling one of God’s attributes above another. True, the Covenant is entirely of *grace*—pure, free, sovereign grace—nevertheless, here, too, grace reigns “through *righteousness*” (Rom 5:21), and not at the expense of it. Christ died not to render any sinner secure in his carnality.

God will not disgrace His grace by entering into covenant with those who are impenitent and openly defying Him. To do so would make him the Condoner of sin, instead of the implacable Hater of it. It is not that the sinner must do something in order to earn the grand blessings of the covenant, or that he must add his quota to the redemptive work of Christ. No, no, *he* contributes not a mite to the procuring of them. That price—and infinitely costly it was—was fully paid by the Lord Jesus Himself. But though God requires naught from us by way of purchasing or meriting those blessings, He *does* in the matter of our *receiving* of them. “The honour of God would fall to the ground if we should be pardoned without our submission, without confession of past sin, or resolution of future obedience: for till then we neither know our true misery, nor are we willing to come out of it; for they that securely continue in their sins, despise both the curse of the Law and the grace of the Gospel” (T. Manton).

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3). It is of course, the Messiah, the spiritual or antitypical David of whom God there speaks—as He is also called “David” in Psalm 89:3, Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24, Hosea 3:5. If proof be needed that it *is* the Lord Jesus who is in view, Acts 13:34-37 supplies it. “The sure mercies of David” are the special and distinguishing favours which are reserved for, and in due time, bestowed upon God’s elect. They are the grand privileges and benefits of the Covenant, which God pledged Himself to impart unto Christ and His seed, upon the completion of His engagement. They are “sure” because of the promises of One who cannot lie, and because they are now dispensed by the victorious and risen Redeemer. They are revealed in the Gospel and presented for the acceptance of faith. “Behold, I have given him [the spiritual David] for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (Isa 55:4). That tells us those “sure mercies” are dispensed in a way of righteousness and holiness. The Gospel presents Christ to us not only as Redeemer, but a Teacher and Ruler: We are required to surrender to Him as our absolute Lord, and voluntarily take His yoke upon us, before He becomes our Saviour and imparts rest unto our souls.

“For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and *take hold of my covenant*; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*” (Isa 56:4-6). Here, we have spiritual and eternal blessings presented under the imagery of the Mosaic economy. It was Old Testament prophecy announcing the distinctive favours of the New Testament dispensation. Under the Mosaic law, “eunuchs” were barred from entering the congregation of the Lord, and the “stranger” or Gentile was barred by the middle wall of partition; but under the Gospel era, these restrictions would no longer obtain, for the grace of God should flow forth unto all without distinction. That which we would specially observe is the clause placed in italics, which sets forth the *human* side of things.

Let us notice carefully what is here predicated of those who “take hold of” God’s covenant. They “keepeth the sabbath from polluting it” (Isa 56:2, 6)—that is, they have a concern for God’s honour and a respect for His Law, and therefore, keep holy that day which He has set apart unto Himself, requiring us to act as per the instructions of Isaiah 58:13. They “choose the things that please” the Holy One (Isa 56:4): They are not self-pleasers, or gratifiers of the flesh, but earnestly endeavour to abstain from whatever God has prohibited, and to perform whatever He has

enjoined; and this not by constraint or fear, but freely and cheerfully. They “join themselves to the LORD” (Isa 56:6)—they seek unto and cleave to Him. They do so in order “to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants” (Isa 56:6). To “serve” Him means to be subject unto Him, to take their orders from Him, to promote His interests. They are resolved to “love his name” (Psa 69:36): Their service is that of friends and not slaves, their faith is one which worketh by love, and their obedience prompted by gratitude. Unless our service proceeds from love, it is valueless. They had given Him their hearts; and therefore, their faculties, talents, time, and strength are dedicated and devoted unto Him. Such are the ones who “taketh hold” of His covenant (Isa 56:6).

“In every covenant, there is something given and something required. To take hold of God’s covenant is to lay claim to the privileges and benefits promised and offered therein. Now this cannot be done unless we choose the things that please Him—that is, voluntarily and deliberately, not by chance, but by choice, enter into a course of obedience wherein we must be pleasing or acceptable to Him: this is the fixed determination of our hearts” (Thomas Manton, 1628-1688). And we never enter upon that course of obedience and do the things which are pleasing unto God, until we have first chosen Him as our absolute Lord, our supreme End, our highest Good, and our everlasting Portion. Negatively, there can be “no taking hold of the covenant,” until we cease all opposition to God. Positively, it is to embrace the Gospel offer and to comply with its terms. The covenant of grace is proffered to us in the Gospel, and to take hold of the former is to heartily consent unto the latter and meet its requirements, giving ourselves to the Lord (2Co 8:5)—freely, unreservedly, for time and eternity. Consent there must be, for none can enjoy the privileges of a charter which they never accepted and agreed to.

What has just been before us in Isaiah 56 is virtually parallel with Isaiah 27:4-5. “Fury is not in me [unless I am provoked by the rebellion of My creatures. In such case]: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together”: Such opposition against the Almighty is utterly futile. If they stir up His wrath, naught but the Lake of Fire can be their portion, unless they avail themselves of His amnesty, throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and be reconciled to Him—which is what is signified by “Or [as the only alternative to burning] let him take hold of my strength”: Let him grasp My arm which is uplifted to smite and crush him. And how shall that be done? Thus, “that he may make peace with me”: That he may cease this sinful fighting against Me; “and he shall make peace with me” (Isa 27:5). God is ready and willing—on the ground of Christ’s satisfaction—to lay aside His vengeance and be reconciled, if the sinner is willing to lay aside his awful enmity and become friends.

“This [Isa 27:4-5] may very well be construed as a summary of the doctrine of the Gospel, with which the church is to be watered every moment. Here is a quarrel supposed between God and man: for here is a battle fought and peace to be made. It is an old quarrel, ever since sin first entered: it is a gracious invitation given us to make up this quarrel: let him that is desirous to be at peace with God take hold on God’s strength, on His strong arm, which is lifted up against the sinner to strike him dead; let him by supplication keep back the stroke. Pardoning mercy is called the power of the Lord; let him take hold of that. Christ crucified is the power of God, let him by a lively faith take hold on Him, as a sinking man catches hold of a plank that is within his reach, or as the malefactor took hold on the horns of the altar...it is vain to think of contesting with Him: it is like setting briers and thorns before a consuming fire. We are not an equal match for Omnipotence. This is the only way, and it is a sure way to reconciliation: let him take this way to make peace with Me, and he shall make peace” (from M. Henry).

“In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten” (Jer 50:4-5). The historical reference is to the liberty which Cyrus gave to the Hebrews to return unto their own land, consequent upon his overthrow of Belshazzar. Unacquainted with the road, the exiled Jews on leaving Babylon for Palestine made inquiry about it. Their case supplied a type of adumbration of the spiritual experiences of God’s people. “In those days” is an Old Testament expression which pointed forward to this Christian era. It was, therefore, one of many evangelical prophecies couched in the language of an historical event. Whatever fulfillment that prophecy may or may not yet have for the Jewish people (and on that matter, we refrain from any dogmatic statement), its present application is to sinners who have been awakened and convicted by the Spirit, so that they are concerned about their spiritual and eternal interests.

Like those in the historical type, these seekers are issuing forth from a lifelong bondage—in sin. Convicted of their guilt and resolved to reform their ways, they are represented as “going and weeping” and determined to “seek the LORD their God” (Jer 50:4)—which, in the New Testament language, would be “repenting” and being “converted.” As M. Henry says: “This represents the return of poor sinners to God. Heaven is the Zion they aim at as their end: on this, they have set their hearts, toward this they have set their faces, and therefore, they ask the way

thither. They do not ask the way to heaven and set their faces to the world, nor set their faces toward heaven and go on at venture without asking the way. In all true converts, there are both a sincere desire to attain the end and a constant care to keep in the way.” Their desire and design was to “join [themselves]...to the LORD in a perpetual covenant” (Jer 50:5). That was something *they* must do; and it is to that particular expression we would ask careful attention, for it has been totally ignored by hyper-Calvinists, who say nothing at all upon the human-responsibility side of the subject—what *we* must do before the benefits of the Covenant are actually made over to us.

APRIL

THE CHRISTIAN INLOOK

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

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

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

It is also true that the Christian needs to be on his guard against becoming too introspective. The secret of a sound and healthy spiritual life lies in preserving the balance between its subjective and objective sides. Salvation indeed comes to the soul by looking outside and away from one’s self unto “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Joh 1:29). Yet the soul will not look unto Him until it has been made sensible of its depravity

and lost condition: “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luk 5:31). And let it not be forgotten that salvation itself is both objective and subjective, for it consists not only of what Christ did *for* His people, but also of what He (by His Spirit) does *in* them; and in fact, the former can only be discovered by us personally through the latter. I have no evidence whatever of my justification apart from my regeneration and sanctification. The one who can say, “I am crucified with Christ” (judicially) can also add, “Christ liveth *in* me” (experimentally); and living by faith in Him is the proof that He “loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The privilege and duty of the believer is, first, to look unto Christ without him and draw from His fulness; and second, to attend unto matters within so that his heart is a meet abode for Him. Thus, in the Song of Solomon, we find Him saying, “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse”—God’s people collectively; and therefore, each of them individually; and then, He goes on to speak of the plants and fruits growing therein, which to Him are “pleasant” (Song 4:12-16). It is a figure of the regenerate soul, in contrast from that of the unregenerate, whose *heart* is likened unto a vineyard utterly neglected and “all grown over with thorns, and nettles” (Pro 24:30-31). Now, a garden needs much care and attention; and so does *the heart*, if Christ is to dwell in it by faith. Accordingly, we find the believer praying to the Spirit (under the figure of the wind—compare John 3:8) for His help: of the “north wind” to kill the pests, and of the “south” to ripen the fruits. Then he invites his Beloved to “come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (Song 4:16)—an invitation to which He graciously responds (Song 5:1).

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

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

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

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

28. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 4

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

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

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

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

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). One of the principal effects of faith is to establish our souls in love—[but is it] of Christ’s love to us, or ours to Him? Both; though here, principally the latter. Our consciousness of Christ’s love for His people produces an answering love in our hearts for Him. There should be no difficulty raised in the mind of the reader by our defining this clause as the Christian’s love: The more I recognise and feed upon Christ’s love to me, the more will there be a response of mine to His. “Rooted and grounded”: Each of those words has its own peculiar force and beauty. A double metaphor is there used—that of a tree, and that of a building. The idea of the former is of its striking deeper and spreading wider into the soil; that of the latter, of the firm and solid basis on which the building rests. Just so far as faith is daily act-

ed upon Him, and Christ occupies the central place in my affections will love for Him be the soil in which my Christian life is rooted and grounded.

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

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

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

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

If, on the one hand, it be true that we must have an experimental knowledge of Christ and of His love to us, it is equally true that we must exercise love to Christ in order the better to know Him and His love. There is a knowledge of Christ and His love which evokes no answering love in the heart of its possessor. There are many in Christendom today who have as clear an intellectual understanding of the person, work, and love of Christ for sinners—as has the saint who enjoys the most intimate fellowship with Him—yet it kindles not a single spark of love within them unto Him. Nor can any one feelingly realise the difference between an intellectual knowledge of Christ and His love and a personal acquaintance with the same, unless he has actually *experienced* it. Experience is the only teacher of feelings and emotions, as it is in the lower sphere of taste and sense. A man knows nothing of the real pangs of hunger, until he is at the point of starving. One must actually partake of wormwood or honey, before he can know from taste the bitterness or the sweetness of them. One cannot know sorrow, but by feeling its ache; and one must love, before he can know what love is.

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

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

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

It is also to be carefully noted that this “comprehend” is distinguished from the “and to know” at the beginning of verse 19, and that it precedes rather than follows it—as we had probably thought. The difference between the two is that the former is more a matter of effort, the latter of intuition; the one, pertaining more distinctly to the mind, the other to the heart. Yet the former is something far more than a mere intellectual or speculative and notional thing, namely, that which is obtained by the renewed understanding. Nor is the one to be so sharply distinguished from the other, as though there was no definite relation between them—the “and” at the beginning of verse 19 clearly shows the contrary. No, rather is there a most intimate connection between the two: In all spiritual exercises, the mind is largely influenced by the heart; and in turn, the affections are regulated by the understanding. The action of the spiritual understanding is always in sympathy with the affections of the heart. In one sense, we must comprehend before we truly love, yet love thus awakened becomes in turn the fountain of desires which nothing can satisfy, but *perfect* knowledge—hence the force of “I shall be satisfied, when I awake [on the resurrection morn], with *thy* likeness” (Psa 17:15).

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

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

8. His Response (1:9-10)

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

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

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

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

“I have *believed* thy commandments” (Psa 119:66). Have we? Do we clearly understand what is signified and included in that statement? To “believe God’s commandments” is to have a ready alacrity to hear God’s voice in them, for the heart to be suitably impressed, and for our actions to be regulated by them. Faith always has to do with God Himself. It is the work of faith to acquaint us with the character of God and His attributes, and to be duly influenced in our souls by a sense of the same. Faith looks to His majesty as truly as it does to His love, and submits to His authority as truly as it delights in His grace. The precepts—as much as the promises—bind us to trust in God: the one issues from His lips and requires a response from us, as much as does the other. The commandments are an expression of God’s will, binding us to our duty; and since they are not addressed unto sense, they must be given unto faith. There can, in fact, be no acceptable obedience, unless it proceeds from faith—Hebrews 11:8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

11d. Its Recovery

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

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

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

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

But suppose the believer *does not* promptly thus confess and forsake his sins? In such case, not only will he “not prosper,” not only can there now be no further spiritual growth, but peace of conscience and joy of heart will depart from him. The Holy Spirit is “grieved,” and He will withhold his comforts. And suppose *that* does not bring him to his senses, then what? Let the case of David furnish answer: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old

through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Psa 32:3-4). The “bones” are the strength and upholders of the bodily frame; and when used figuratively, the “waxing of them old” signifies that vigour and support of the soul is gone, so that it sinks into anguish and despair. Sin is a pestilential thing which saps our vitality. Though David was silent as to confession, he was not so as to sorrow. God’s hand smote his conscience and afflicted his spirit so that he was made to groan under His rod. He had no rest by day or night: Sin haunted him in his dreams, and he awoke unrefreshed. Like one in a drought, he was barren and fruitless. Not until he turned to the Lord in contrite confession was there any relief for him.

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

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

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

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

The young Christian might well suppose that one who was in the path of obedience, who was going on wholeheartedly with God, who was a man of the “tent” and the “altar” would be quite immune from any fall. So he will be, while he maintains that relationship and attitude: But it is, alas, very easy for him to relax a little and gradually depart from it. Not that such a departure is to be expected—or excused—on the ground that since the flesh remains

in the believer, it is only to be looked for; that it will not be long ere it unmistakably manifests itself. Not so: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6). Full provision has been made by God for him to do so. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). But Abram *did* suffer a relapse—a serious one—and as it is profitable for us to observe and take to heart the various steps which preceded Peter’s open denial of Christ, so it is to ponder and turn into earnest supplication that which befell the patriarch, before he “went *down* into Egypt” (Gen 12:10).

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

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

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

“And Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there” (Gen 12:10); and thus it is with many of his children. Instead of being “exercised” by God’s chastenings (Heb 12:11)—as they should be—they treat them as a matter of course, as part of the inevitable troubles which man is born unto; and thus “despise” them (Heb 12:5) and derive no good from them. Alas, the average Christian instead of being “*exercised*” (in conscience and mind) under God’s rod, rather does he ask, “How may I most easily and quickly get from under it?” If illness come upon me, instead of turning to the Lord and asking, “Shew me *wherefore* thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2), they send for the doctor, which is seeking relief from Egypt. Abram had left Bethel, and one who is out of communion with God cannot trust Him with his temporal affairs, but turns instead to an arm of flesh. Observe well the “Woe” which God has denounced upon those who go down into Egypt—turn to the world—for help (Isa 30:1-2).

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

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

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

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

This is the only way in which it is possible to find rest unto our souls. As “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Act 4:12), so neither is there any other by which a backsliding saint can be restored. Whatever be the nature or the extent of our departure from God, there is no other way of return to Him, but by the Mediator. Whatever be the wounds of sin has inflicted upon our souls, there is no other remedy for them, but the precious Blood of the Lamb. If we have no heart to repent and return unto God by Jesus Christ, then we are yet in our sins, and may expect to reap the fruits of them. Scripture has no counsel short of that. We have many encouragements to do so. God is of exceeding great and tender mercy, and willing to forgive all who return to Him in the name of His Son: Though our sins be as scarlet (Isa 1:18), the atoning blood of Christ is able to cleanse them. There is “plenteous redemption” (Psa 130:7) with Him. As Abram, David, Jonah, and Peter were restored, so may I; so may you be.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9d. Its Reception

There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2); and the ecclesiastical history of the last three centuries supplies many sad examples of the same. In opposing the Papist fiction of human merits, some went too far in the opposite direction and failed to enforce the necessity of good works. In protesting against a general or indefinite atonement, and in contending for particular redemption, not a few hyper-Calvinists repudiated the free

offer of the Gospel. Many handled the total depravity and spiritual inability of the natural man in such a manner that his responsibility was completely undermined. In their ardour to magnify the sovereign grace of God, men often lost sight of the moral requirements of His righteousness. There has been a lamentable lack of balance in presenting the inseparable truths of justification and sanctification, and the privileges and duties of believers. The perseverance of the saints in faith and holiness has not received nearly so much emphasis among Calvinists as has the divine preservation of them; nor have they said one-tenth as much on repentance as on faith. The same grievous defect appears in many of the sermons preached on *the Covenant*. The Puritans were thoroughly sound and symmetrical thereon, but some who followed them—though posing as the champions of Truth—were very lopsided.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As the Puritan William Gurnall (1617-1679) so faithfully remarked upon Psalm 50:5: “We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ’s name, we enlist ourselves in His muster-roll and by it, do promise that we will live and die with Him in opposition to all His enemies. He will not entertain us till we resign up ourselves freely to His disposal, that there may be no disputing with His commands afterwards, but as one under authority, go and come at His word.” So too T. Manton: “You have no benefit by the covenant till you personally enter into the bond of it. It is true, God being pacified by Christ offereth pardon and acceptance on the condition of the covenant, but we do not actually partake of the benefits till we perform those conditions. Though the price be paid by Christ, accepted by the Father, yet we have not an actual interest, through our own default, for not accepting God’s covenant. What shall we do? Bless God for His grace. Own Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, and the Fountain of our life and peace. Devote yourselves to God, to serve and please Him.”

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

for a backslider to be restored, he must needs *renew* his covenant with God, for the recovery of such an one is a new “conversion” (Luk 22:32). And therefore, he is required to “do the first works” (Rev 2:5).

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

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

We are advocating no new or strange doctrine when we insist that the Everlasting Covenant and the Gospel *requires from us* repentance and faith, full surrender unto God, and the steadfast performance of obedience unto the end of our lives. “The obligation on us unto holiness is *equal* as unto what it was under the Law, though a relief be provided, where unavoidably we come short of it. There is, therefore, nothing more certain than that there is no relaxation given us as unto any duty of holiness by the Gospel, nor any indulgence unto the least sin. But yet upon the supposition of the acceptance of *sincerity*, and a perfection of parts instead of degrees, with mercy provided for our failings and sins, there is an argument to be taken from the command unto indispensable necessity of holiness, including in it the highest encouragement to endeavour after it. For together with the command, there is also grace administered, enabling us unto the obedience which God will accept. Nothing therefore can avoid or evacuate the power of this command and argument from it, but a stubborn contempt of God arising from the love of sin” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

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

Let us now seek to remove one or two difficulties, which may have been raised in the minds of our friends. When we affirm that God’s ministers are to make a free offer of the Gospel to every creature, and that they are to call upon all who hear it, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20), that *does not* imply that the results of Christ’s death are rendered uncertain, that the success of His redemptive work is suspended on the caprice of man’s will. Not at all. It has been far too little recognised that God has more than one design in sending forth the Gospel. First, it is for the glory of Christ—a worldwide proclamation of His excellencies. God intends that a universal testimony shall be borne to the person and work of the One who so superlatively honoured Him. Second, the preaching of the

Gospel is made a further test of corrupt nature, demonstrating that men love darkness rather than light. Third, God uses the Gospel as a remedial agency in curbing the wickedness of the world, for many are reformed by it who are never savingly transformed thereby, making this scene a safer place for His people to pass through. It is also the means whereby He calls out His elect: the sieve wherein the wheat is separated from the chaff.

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

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

That was admirably set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith—the joint and studied production of many of the ablest of the Puritans. “Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by the first covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, *requiring* of them faith in Him that they might be saved, and *promising* to give unto all those who are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” The grand change in our legal relation to God, secured by Christ’s satisfaction, is infallibly followed by the great change in our experimental relation to God, as that is wrought in us by the Spirit’s work of regeneration and sanctification, the one being the fruit of the other—the reward assured the Surety on behalf of those He represented. Our reconciliation to God (through the renewing of the Spirit) is the sure consequence of His reconciliation to us, and a faith which worketh by love, which goes out in acts of holy obedience, is the evidence of our new birth and of our having entered into covenant with God.

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

FORBIDDEN SUBJECTION

“And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Mat 23:9-10). This passage supplies a pertinent illustration of something we make reference to every once in a while in these pages—namely, the danger of being misled by the sound of a verse through failing to ascertain its *sense*, and understanding it in a way which is contrary to the Analogy of Faith. According to the sound of its *words*, this passage prohibits the believer from designating his sire “father,” or his employer “master”; and by parity of reason, forbids him to be so addressed by others. But obviously, that cannot be its meaning; for if it be divorced from its context, and its terms taken absolutely at their face value, Scripture would be made to contradict itself. Christianity does not set aside the ordinary relations of life, but ennobles them. Christian sires are specifically called “fathers,” and their responsibilities as such are enforced (Eph 6:4-5). As Matthew 23:9 is not a rescinding of the child’s duty unto his parents, neither is it to be regarded as repressing believers from having respect and affection for their spiritual “fathers” (2Ki 2:12; 1Co 4:15).

In Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 4:1, the Holy Spirit expressly terms Christian employers “masters” and presses their duties upon them; while in 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:9, servants are instructed how they are to conduct themselves unto them. Thus, in the light of these passages, it cannot be wrong for workmen to address their employer as “master,” or for a Christian employer to allow his men to call him such. Having pointed out what Matthew 23:9-10 does *not* mean, let us explain what it *does* signify. As a father is one to whom God has given authority over his children and is required to nurture and discipline them, so also a master is one who has the right to give orders to those whom he employs and to apportion the work of those men whom he hires—that is, in the natural sphere: in the home and workshop. But it was concerning the *religious* realm that Christ was here legislating, forbidding His disciples to look up to any man who posed as a pope, to subject themselves unto a tyrant who sought to have dominion over their faith, or regulate their conduct. Suffer none to usurp authority and rule over you is the force of Christ’s injunctions.

The key to Matthew 23:9-10 is found in the context. The Lord Jesus, who came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, was giving instructions “to the multitude, *and* to his disciples” (Mat 23:1)—to the former in verse 3; to the latter in verses 8-11. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Mat 23:2); that is, they occupy positions of authority and demand full and implicit subjection from their followers. Whatsoever they enjoined—which was a legitimate enforcing of the Mosaic law—must be dutifully complied with. But they exceeded their rights, usurped authority, and set themselves up as tyrannical dictators, binding “heavy burdens and grievous to be borne” and laid them “on men’s shoulders” (Mat 23:4). By their self-devised enactments and traditions, such as the washing of hands, etc. (Mat 15:2), they invented a system of outward and ceremonial sanctity, which was stricter and more irksome than the Levitical law—their design being to gain a reputation of super-eminent piety before men (Mat 15:4-7). Now, says Christ to His disciples, Be ye not like unto such hypocrites in any of these respects, and refuse allegiance or submission to any who imitate them.

Such a word of warning has ever been needed by the Lord’s people, who are, for the most part, simple and unsophisticated, trustful, and readily imposed upon. And in each succeeding generation, there have appeared men of an officious and domineering spirit, who aspired to leadership and demanded subserviency from their fellows. Such men, when endowed with natural gifts above the average, become founders of new sects and parties, and insist upon unquestioning obedience from their disciples. *Their* interpretations of Scripture must not be questioned, their punctilios of piety must not be challenged, their dicta are final; in a word, they demand subjection to themselves as “fathers” and “masters.” Everyone must believe precisely what *they* teach, and regulate their conduct in all details according to their rules, or be branded heretics and condemned for gratifying the flesh. There have been, and still are, many little “popes” in the Protestant circles who consider themselves entitled to implicit credence and submission, whose decisions must be accepted without question.

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Mat 23:8). No Christian—whatever be his gifts or graces—has any right to set himself up as an authoritative “rabbi” and give orders to his fellow-believers, for all of them are brethren—equal in rights, in privileges, and in their standing before God. For one to act as a Diotrephes (3Jo 9) is to usurp the prerogative of Christ (Col 1:18). Therefore, any who would affect lordship over those whom Christ purchased by His blood are to be steadfastly opposed, their pretensions ignored, and their claims disallowed. “And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Mat 23:9). Suffer no man to be the director of your faith, or the governor of your life, any further than he produces a plain and decisive, “Thus saith the Lord” as the foundation of his appeal. “Not for that we have dominion over your faith” (2Co 1:24), said the chief of the apostles unto the saints: Faith rests not on the testimony of man, nor is it subject to any man, but to God alone.

“Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Mat 23:10). All Christians are equally dependent upon and subject to one common Lord; and any man who sets himself up as a spiritual dictator is demanding that honour to which none—save the Redeemer—is entitled; and we are a party to his wicked presumption, if we yield deference to him and submit to his rule. To give place to his whims and wishes is to renounce our Christian liberty and to become serfs. To illustrate: If your pastor requires you to abstain from eating meat on Friday, or prohibits the lawful use of things (such as wine) which God had not interdicted, and yield to his demands, then you are “calling” him—owning him—as your “master.” Romans 14:3-4 helps us to interpret Matthew 23:10. Certain Judaisers sought to bind burdens on Gentile saints which God has not appointed, and condemned them for a non-compliance with their demands. To them, Paul said, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?”: He is not under your dominion, he owes no subjection to *you*. Then he added, “to his own master [which you are not] he standeth or falleth.”

Thus, the simple meaning of Matthew 23:8-10 is, Let no Christian arrogate unto himself the right to frame laws and rules, and then require the submission of his fellows to them, for that is to usurp the right which belongs alone unto Christ. Allow no man to have dominion over your faith, to lord it over your conscience, to dictate unto you how you shall order the details of your life. “Ye are bought with a price [and belong to the Purchaser]; be not ye the servants of men” (1Co 7:23). Suffer none to bring you into the bondage of “the commandments and doctrines of men” and “Touch not; taste not; handle not...” (Col 2:21-22). “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:1). Be regulated solely by the precepts of God’s Word. Allow no pope or sect to rob you of the right of private judgment, and infringe not on the right of your brother.

More than once in the past, we have pointed out that the conditions which obtain in the profane world are but a repercussion of those which prevailed first in the professing world; that the state of things in the political, industrial, and social realm, is only a reflection of things in the ecclesiastical. God’s Law was banished from the pulpit, and the assembly before lawlessness became rife in the community. Discipline ceased to be enforced in “the house of God” (the local church), before it disappeared from the home. Religious infidelity between those bearing the name of Christ and His open enemies was widespread ere martial infidelity became so general. A famine of hearing the Word of God preceded the world-wide food shortage, which we are now witnessing. And those who set up themselves as “masters” and “fathers” over the saints were the forerunners of national and international dictators. Christians at large took the line of least resistance and yielded much of their spiritual liberty; and now the rank and file of people are “directed” and “controlled” by the state. Having sown the wind, it is inevitable we should reap the whirlwind (Hos 8:7). (*Now read “Commanded Subjection” in the next issue.*)

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

29. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 5

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), the eminent Puritan, began his exposition of verse 17 by declaring, “This prayer of Paul’s for the Ephesians is according to the utmost elevation and height of his own experience of what he could pray for.” A later writer—for whose heavenly mindedness and spiritual judgment we have a high regard—said, “In this prayer of Paul’s, he prayed like an apostle indeed, for he begged here for the greatest blessings which believers can, in this life, enjoy, or God Himself can bestow upon them. It may be said of this prayer that it is

the greatest prayer which is to be found in the New Testament, that of our Lord in the seventeenth chapter of John only excepted" (Sam E. Pierce). While one nearer our own day pointed out, "In no part of Paul's letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some magnificent suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence chamber, until at last we stand there" (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1910).

With the above opinions and sentiments, we are entirely in accord. O that we had the capacity to—humanly and relatively at least—do this prayer, something like justice, as we attempt to "open" its sublime contents. That the apostle was here making request for no ordinary blessings is at once apparent by its opening sentence—for he there asks the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant unto His people, "according to the riches [not only of His "grace," but] of his *glory*" (Eph 3:16). That is, he besought the Father to bestow in accord with that rule or standard of measurement, asking for the most valuable and glorious things that the renewed mind can conceive. Four particular favours he here requested, and the order in which he preferred them is a strictly logical and necessary one; and therefore, one which cannot be changed without doing violence and damage to it. That order is both doctrinal and practical, experimental and climacteric. They are distinguished from each other by the recurring, "that ye"; and the force of that "that" ("in order that") is causative and preparative.

There is a most intimate relation between the several petitions, each of them rising above and being a consequence of the preceding; the second being suggested by and leading out from the first; and the second in turn being both the condition and occasion of the third; and so with the subsequent one. They are like four steps of an ascent, each of which has to be trodden before the next can be reached. At the summit or top of the ascent is the petition that the saints might be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19), for there can be nothing above or beyond that. *There* is the climax of all prayer, of all spiritual experience, of all soul bliss; and we make so bold to say that no uninspired mind had ever conceived of such a favour or experience. Yet that very experience is what writer and reader should earnestly covet; and that very favour is what *we* are fully warranted in asking for! But bear carefully in mind that the prayer does not begin there: that is the summit, and an ascent has to be claimed in order to reach it.

The first step—the initial favour sought—is "that...[ye may] be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16); and that is not only an indispensable requirement if we are to take the second step, but it is equally necessary as a preparation unto the third and fourth—only by the energizing enablement of the blessed Spirit are we capacitated to move forward and upward. The next step toward the summit—the second favour sought—is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"; and the consequence of our being believingly occupied with His perfections is our "being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17)—i.e. the Christian's life of devotedness and obedience to Christ thus growing out of and being based upon his love for Him—the reflex of His love to us. The third step of spiritual ascent and blessing sought is "that ye...May be able to comprehend...And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:17-19). Love begets love. Love is reciprocal. First, faith centering upon the person and work of Christ stimulates love to Him, and that in turn fits the heart to enter more deeply into an understanding and enjoyment of His love. Such, in brief, is how we understand the ground covered to this point. Now to proceed.

"That ye...May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:17-19). It is of prime importance for the nourishment, health, and fruitfulness of his spiritual life that the believer should be constantly occupied with the love of Christ. It has been well designated, "A subject altogether wonderful, mysterious, and divine, so great and so immense that the more real saints think of it, the more the Holy Spirit is pleased at any time to give them spiritual conceptions of it, the more they are swallowed up in admiring and adoring thoughts of it and crying out, *O the depth!*" (S. Pierce). Or as Thomas Goodwin expressed it: "It is a sea of love, a sea that knoweth neither shore nor bottom." There is nothing in nature which illustrates it, nothing in human history or experience which exemplifies it. Only in the divine relations can we find any analogy; and there, one is given to us, which—though it fills the heart with joy and satisfaction—is nevertheless far above the grasp of our finite minds. Said the Lover of our souls, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (Joh 15:9). *That is such* a love as we can neither express nor conceive, yet it should be the one subject on which our hearts are continuously set and from which we daily drink.

"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you" (Joh 15:9). "As the Father loved Him from everlasting, so did He love them; as His Father loved Him with a love of complacency and delight, so did He love them; as the Father loved Him with a special and peculiar affection, with an unchanging, invariable, constant love, which would last forever, in like manner does Christ love His people" (John Gill, 1697-1771). Christ has loved His Church with all His soul from everlasting. His heart was fixed upon His Bride before all worlds. He loved her as the gift of the

Father's love to Him. He loved her as presented to Him by the Father in all her beauty, glory, and excellency, in which she was forever to shine forth as His Wife in the kingdom of glory. He loved her as His mystical body, in whom all His glory was to be displayed and admired. He loved her as His "peculiar treasure" (Exo 19:5; Psa 135:4), as "the travail of his soul" (Isa 53:11), as His very own. He was to be her life, her light, her holiness, her righteousness, her perfection and glory—for she was to receive all from Him as her eternal Head and Husband. The origin and spring of Christ's love to His beloved is high and incomprehensible—for it originated in the Father's everlasting love to Him as God-man, and to them as the Spouse which He had chosen, loved, beautified, and bestowed on His dear Son.

The love of Christ unto His people and His heart in heaven towards them transcends all conception. His divine person stamps eternal perfection on His love, as well as everlasting worth, virtue, and efficacy on all His mediatorial acts. He who is the Son of the living God—as considered in His distinctive person in the Trinity, who is the God-man in His theanthropic person—is the One in whom the Church was loved, chosen, and accepted before the foundation of the world. His people were divinely-appointed to partake with Him in all His communicable grace and glory, to share in all His honours, titles, and dignities, so far as they are shareable. Nothing would satisfy the heart of Christ, but that His redeemed should live with Him in heaven, to behold Him in His glory, and to be perfected in felicity by seeing Him as He is. The wonders contained in it are such as can never be fully explored. All that is contained in His love will never be comprehended by the saints; no, not in glory. That which hath been manifested of it in His incarnation, and in His obedience and suffering, is altogether beyond what saints can ever sufficiently appreciate and bless Him for. It is cause for deepest gratitude that we have been brought to know it, to believe it, and to enjoy it.

But since the love of Christ is so transcendent and mysterious, so infinite and incomprehensible, how can it be comprehended and known by us? Completely and perfectly it cannot, yet truly and satisfyingly, it may be. Christ's love to us is discovered in the Word of Truth; and as the Holy Spirit enlightens our understandings, we are capacitated to apprehend something of its wonders and blessedness. As the Holy Spirit strengthens us within and calls our faith into exercise, we are enabled to take in some spiritual views of it. Faith is to the soul what the eye is to the body—the organ or faculty by which light is admitted, and by which objects are seen and known. "Through faith we understand" (Heb 11:3) that which is beyond the comprehension of mere reason. Though we cannot fathom the love of Christ, we may drink into it. "We may know how excellent, how wonderful, how free, how disinterested, how longsuffering, how manifold, and constant it is, and that it is *infinite*. And this knowledge is the highest and most sanctifying of all knowledge. Those who thus know the love of Christ towards them purify themselves even as He is pure" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). Though we shall never be able to exhaust its unsearchable fulness; nevertheless, it is our privilege to know very much more of it and have a fuller enjoyment thereof than any of us have yet attained unto.

It should be the chief spiritual employment of the Christian to live in consideration and admiration of the wondrous love of Christ: to dwell upon it in his thoughts until his heart is warmed, his soul overflows with praise, and his whole life is constrained or influenced thereby. He should meditate daily on its *characteristics*: its freeness, its pureness, its untaintedness, its immutability—that Christ loves us more than we love ourselves, that He loved us even while we hated Him, that nothing can change His love for us. We should ponder the *manifestations* of His love. First, in His acceptance of the Father's proposals in the everlasting covenant, whereby He freely consented to become the Sponsor of His fallen people and serve as their Surety. And then in His actual carrying out of that engagement. View Him leaving the holy tranquility and ineffable bliss of Heaven, where He was so worshipped and adored by all the celestial hosts and coming down to this scene of sin, strife, and suffering! What love was that!

Consider Jehovah's condescending to take upon Him a nature that was inferior to the angelic, so that when the Word became flesh, His divine glory was almost completely eclipsed. Contemplate the unspeakable humiliation into which the Son of God descended, a humiliation which can only be gauged as we measure the distance between the throne of Heaven and the manger of Bethlehem. Bear in mind that—even as the incarnate One—He made Himself of no reputation, that instead of appearing in pomp and splendour, He "took upon him the form of a servant" (Phi 2:7). That He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, deeming not the most ignominious acts as beneath Him. Remember that *He knew* from the beginning the kind of treatment He would receive from those He befriended; that instead of being welcomed, appreciated, loved, and worshipped, He would be despised and rejected of men. That though He went about doing good, healing the sick, relieving the needy, preaching the Gospel to the poor, He would be opposed and persecuted by the religious leaders, hated without a cause, and misunderstood and ultimately deserted even by His own disciples. What love was that! Love indeed which passeth knowledge. Love which should ceaselessly occupy our hearts and shape our lives.

Reverently contemplate the unparalleled and unmeasureable sufferings which the eternal Lover of thy soul endured. Remove the shoes of carnal curiosity from thy feet and enter the dark shades of Gethsemane, and behold thy Saviour in agony of soul so intense that He shed great drops of blood. Then observe Him led as a Lamb to the slaughter and treated as the vilest of criminals. Ponder afresh the horrible insults which were heaped upon the Holy One, as wicked hands smote Him, spat in His face, plucked off His hair, and scourged Him. Behold the blasphemy of that mock coronation when they put a purple robe upon Him, placed a reed in His hand, and a crown of thorns on His head, and cried, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mat 27:29). View Him suspended upon the cross between two malefactors, mocked with vinegar and gall when He said, "I thirst" (Joh 19:28), and derided by the spectators. But more: Contemplate Him there, made sin for His people, made a curse for them, and accordingly smitten by the sword of divine justice, so that He exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). In view of which, must we not say, "Christ also hath *loved* us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph 5:2).

But the love of Christ for His people did not cease at His death, nor did the manifestations and evidences of it. His love was as fresh, as intense, and as active when He ascended on high, as it was when He was here below. It was with the interests of His people before Him that He ascended, entering heaven in their name: "Whither the forerunner is *for us* entered" (Heb 6:20). Having purged our sins with His own precious blood, Christ sat down upon the mediatorial throne; and having been given a name which is above every name, He was crowned with glory and honour *as* the Head of the Church, as the triumphant Conqueror of Satan and the grave. There, in His exalted state, He now shines forth within the veil before the saints—"the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23)—His heart filled with the same love towards His people as it ever was. As of old, Aaron wore a breastplate on which were inscribed all the tribes of Israel (Exo 28:29-30), so our great High Priest bears all the names of His people on His heart, as He appears before God on their behalf. The exercise of His love to them is seen in that "he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). So tender is His heart unto His own that, even in the Glory, He is still "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15).

Manifestations of the infinite and unchanging love of Christ are made to His people while they are left in this wilderness of sin: by His supplying their every need, by His making all things work together for their good, by His personal communings with them. The gift of the Holy Spirit was an outstanding evidence of His love to them (Joh 16:7; Act 2:33). Nor was that all: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). Are you favoured, dear reader, to sit under the ministry of a faithful pastor, who breaks to you the Bread of life, feeds you with knowledge and understanding, and stimulates you to run with patience the race that is set before you? Then you should look upon that pastor as the love-gift of your ascended Saviour. Do you find a book written by a servant of God, or even a monthly magazine, edifying to your soul, made a blessing to your heart, supplying motives unto a godly walk, and affording comfort and encouragements amid the difficulties of the way? Then you should look upon the same as a gracious provision made for you by the *love* of Christ.

It is to be carefully noted that the apostle did not here pray that the saints might comprehend, absolutely, the love of Christ itself; but rather the *dimensions* of it. First, "*what is the breadth*" (Eph 3:18). This writer has long been impressed with the fact that *that* comes first—for is it not *there* our thoughts are most faulty? Are not many of us so wrapped up in the consideration of Christ's wondrous love to *me*, that we fail to appreciate its wider scope and blessed extent? Is it not, then, to correct this selfish tendency that the Holy Spirit mentions as the breadth of Christ's love first? And is it not also to counteract that sectarian spirit, which cramps the affections of so many of God's own people? It is also opposed to the modern error of dispensationalists, who would restrict the riches of Christ's love unto New Testament believers. No doubt it was immediately intended for the instruction of the Jewish saints, who were so slow to realise the love of Christ reached also unto sinners among the Gentiles. Christ's love extends to all the elect, in every age, in every place, in every state and case. It is a love which embraces the *whole* family of God, from the least to the greatest.

"*And length*" (Eph 3:18). Is not the order of these measures quite different from how an uninspired writer had arranged them?—different from the natural and logical order? Would we not—as so many of the commentators and sermonizers actually do, even with this verse before them—have gone from "breadth" to "depth"? But the Holy Spirit places first what we are apt to put last. If we are slow to grasp (in an experimental way) the compass of Christ's love, many are most tardy in apprehending (in a doctrinal way) the *eternity* of it. How many suppose that Christ only began to love them when they set their own affection upon Him: But "we love him, because he first loved us" (1Jo 4:19); and as His love knows no end, so it has no beginning, being from everlasting to everlasting. Says the Lord unto each of His people, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkind-

ness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3)—His drawing us unto Himself is the effect of His love. Nor can our infirmities or even our iniquities quench it: “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them *unto the end*” (Joh 13:1)—nothing can separate us from it (Rom 8:35-39).

“*And depth*” (Eph 3:18). That can indeed be best comprehended by considering the amazing love of Christ to me personally—for if I have been made the subject of an inward work of grace, then I realise to some extent, actually and experimentally, the horrible pit in which I lay, and the awful moral distance to which my sins had separated me from the Holy One. I can apprehend better my own sad case than I can the plight of others; and therefore, I am better able to comprehend the amazing love of Christ in stooping so low as to lift me out of the miry clay, than I can the cases of others. The depth of Christ’s love is to be contemplated in the light of the abject wretchedness unto which the fall plunged the Church, for its members are “by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3). It is to be contemplated in the light of our individual history, when as unregenerate, we departed farther and farther from God. It is to be contemplated in the light of the unparalleled depth of abasement and suffering, into which the Lord of glory descended to effect the deliverance and salvation of His people.

“*And height*” (Eph 3:18). If the breadth of Christ’s love be boundless, its length endless, its depth fathomless, then assuredly its height is measureless. The “height” to which the love of Christ has elevated His redeemed is to be viewed in the light of two things: Their present privileges, and their future felicity. Both of which are best set forth in the language of Holy Writ itself: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dung-hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory” (1Sa 2:8). “Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isa 56:5). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16-17). “And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 22:4-5).

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

9. His Response (1:10-18)

“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it” (Jos 1:10-11). It is striking to note the iteration of this word, “commanded.” First, the Lord declared unto Joshua, “Have not I commanded thee?” (Jos 1:9); then he commanded his officers, and they, in turn, commanded the people: The exercise of divinely-given authority and the requirement of implicit obedience were essential, if success was to be theirs. And those two things are indispensable today, if we would have the Lord show Himself strong on our behalf. If the minister of the Gospel be required to “exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Ti 2:15), those committed to his care are bidden, “Obey them that have the rule over you” (Heb 13:17). God requires from His people a subjection to the ministerial office, as truly as he does to the magisterial in the civil realm (Rom 13) and to the husband and parent in the domestic (Eph 5:22; 6:1). Discipline must be maintained in the house of God.

“*Prepare you victuals*” (Jos 1:11). A journey lay ahead, a strenuous campaign was before them, but the one thing enjoined by way of anticipation was “prepare you victuals.” The spiritual significance and application of that unto ourselves is obvious. If we would be strong and stout-hearted—and therefore equipped for our warfare—we must be well-fed: “Nourished up in the words of faith” (1Ti 4:6). The “victuals” are furnished us by God, but we must “prepare” them. At no point does God encourage slothfulness. Unless we give good heed to this injunction, we shall not be able to overcome our foes. That word is addressed as directly to us today as it was unto Israel in the time of Joshua. We are guilty of flagrant dishonesty if we appropriate to ourselves the promises, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee...for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:5, 9), and disregard the precepts, “Meditate therein day and night...Observe to do according to all that is written...Be strong and of a good courage...Prepare you victuals” (Jos 1:8, 9, 11).

“Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan” (Jos 1:11). One had naturally expected that order to “prepare you *boats*”—for there was no bridge across the river. There had been none over the Red Sea, yet Israel had crossed it safely, dryshod—and that without recourse to boats or rafts. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “He that brought them out of Egypt on eagle’s wings, would in like manner bear them into Canaan.” Such was evidently Joshua’s expectation on this occasion. He was fully assured that if he and those under him rendered obedience to the divine Will, they would count upon God’s help; hence, his contemptuous *“this Jordan”*—it would present no difficulty to Omnipotence, nor need it dismay them. “Within three days ye *shall* pass over this Jordan”—not “ye may” nor “ye shall attempt to do so”: It was the language of full confidence—not in them, nor in himself, but in the living God. Such must be the spirit of those who feed and lead God’s people today; otherwise, they will depress rather than hearten.

There is an important typical and spiritual truth contained in that “three days”: It is the number of resurrection. It is only as the Christian conducts himself as one who is risen with Christ that he can overcome the flesh, the world, and the devil; and that requires two things from him: The exercise of faith and of obedience. Faith seeing myself as God sees me, faith viewing myself as one with Christ in His death and resurrection, faith appropriating His victory over sin, death, and Satan. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). That is the “reckoning” of faith—for feelings have nothing whatever to do with it. It is taking our stand on the infallible Word of God, irrespective of our conscious “experience.” In the reckoning of the divine Law, the one who trustfully commits his soul unto Christ has “passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24), and faith is to accept that blessed truth on the bare but all-sufficient authority of God. The believer is legally and vitally united to a risen and triumphant Saviour.

What has just been pointed out is of first importance. There can be no real peace for the conscience, no substantial rest of soul, no lasting joy of heart, until the Christian is assured on the authority of Him who cannot lie that “our old man is [Greek “was”] crucified with him” (Rom 6:6); and that we are “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1). The believer cannot *walk* on resurrection ground, until it is a settled and glorious fact in his mind that he is *on* resurrection ground, legally one with his risen Surety, rejoicing that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1); yea, glorying in the fact that the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to his account. When that is received by faith, then “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10). I cannot possibly go forward and “fight the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12), nor expect any success in overcoming the Canaanites, so long as I doubt my acceptance before God and fail to realise my union with Christ. That is foundational; and we repeat, feelings have nothing whatever to do with it.

But something more than the exercise of faith—resting on the declarations of Holy Writ—is required if I am to enter experimentally and practically into the good of my being legally one with Christ; and that is, the rendering of obedience to Him. “He died for all [His people], that they which live [legally] should not henceforth live [practically] unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:15). “But now we are delivered from [the curse of] the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit” (Rom 7:6)—from a spirit of gratitude and joy. Henceforth the Christian is to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4): A new principle is to actuate him—love; a new design is to regulate him—honouring his Master. The self-will which dominated him while unregenerate is to be displaced by seeking to please Christ in all things. *That* is to “walk in newness of life,” on resurrection ground.

The antitypical Canaan is ours. It is the “purchased possession” (Eph 1:14) bought by Christ’s precious blood. That inheritance is to be enjoyed *now*: by faith, by hope, by fixing our affection upon things above. As we do so, we experimentally “possess our possessions.” “The upright shall have good things in possession” (Pro 28:10)—not merely in prospect, but in actual possession. But there are powerful foes seeking to keep us from enjoying our heritage! True, but we may obtain victory over them, as Israel did over theirs. We may, we shall, in proportion, as faith is in exercise and as we walk obediently. Note the precision and meaning of Joshua’s language: “To go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God *giveth* you to possess it” (Jos 1:11). God had given Canaan in promise long before (Jos 1:3), but that promise was to be realised by *that* generation, according as they submitted themselves to Him. So it is with us: God will give us a present possession, if we meet His requirements.

The Lord God had sworn unto their fathers, “to give them” the land Canaan (Jos 1:6), yet that did not preclude strenuous efforts on their part. Hitherto He had furnished them with manna—for there was nothing in the wilderness they could live upon—but now His command was, “Prepare you victuals” (Jos 1:11); and that was indicative of what was required from *them*: They must discharge their responsibility. The Lord never panders to laziness: It is the one who is out and out for Him who enjoys most of His smile. A protracted conflict had to be waged, and success therein was made dependent upon their implicit compliance with God’s orders through Joshua—only thus

would He give the land into their possession. That is the central message of this book: Unreserved obedience, as the condition of God's putting forth His power against our enemies and bringing us into the enjoyment of our inheritance.

“And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you” (Jos 1:12-13). The reference is to what is recorded in Numbers 32. Upon Israel's conquest of the kingdoms of the Amorites and Bashan (Num 32:33), the two and half tribes who had “a very great multitude of cattle” (Num 32:1) came to Moses and asked, “Let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan” (Num 32:5). At first, he was very displeased, regarding their request as proceeding from unbelief and from an unwillingness to bear their share in the fighting which lay ahead. But being assured that on permission being granted them to build sheepfolds for their cattle and dwellings for their children, their men-folk would accompany the other tribes and fight with them until Canaan was conquered (Num 32:16-19), Moses consented to their proposal (Num 32:20-24).

If careful attention be paid to Moses' words on that occasion, we see how that incident supplied a striking illustration of what is dominant in this book. Numbers 32:33 says, “he *gave* unto them” that portion of country, yet it was not an absolute grant but a provisional one, which turned upon the faithful discharge of their responsibility. If the reader does not like the sound of that statement, if it clashes with his “belief,” let him pay extra diligence to what follows, and if needs be, *correct* his “beliefs.” “And Moses said unto them, *If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war...until...the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return [to your side of the Jordan], and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD*” (Num 32:20-22). They agreed: “Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth” (Num 32:25).

Then we are told, “So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun” (Num 32:28). Accordingly, now that Moses was dead and the Lord's time had come for Israel to enter Canaan, Joshua said unto those two and a half tribes, “*Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you*” (Jos 1:13). In so doing, he complied with his commission, for Jehovah had bidden him, “observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee” (Jos 1:7); and this was one of those things (Num 32:28)! It was not natural prudence or a spirit of expediency which actuated Joshua to seek their co-operation; still less was it from fear that the remaining tribes would be insufficient for the task confronting them—but it was obedience to his Master which regulated his action.

Joshua did not take it for granted that the two and a half tribes would now carry out their agreement, but he definitely reminded them of the same and held them to it. But note *how* he did so. He did not beg for their compliance as a favour unto himself—I hope you will be willing to serve under *me*. Nor did he appeal on behalf of their brethren—the other tribes will be encouraged if you are willing to help them. Nor did he bid them to remember their promise to Moses. No, he pressed upon them the *Word* of God! That is another lesson for the servants of God to heed today: If we would honour Him, *we* must honour His Word, by enforcing its requirements. “God...now *commandeth* all men every where to repent” should be their language to the unsaved.

“Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land...but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it” (Jos 1:13-15). There are a number of things here on which we can but briefly touch. That word “remember” signifies “heed” and is invariably a call to obedience. The fact that their portion had *already* been “given,” it placed an additional obligation on them—gratitude demanded their compliance. As M. Henry reminds us, “When God by His providence has given us rest, we ought to consider how we may honour Him with the advantages of it, and what service we may do to our brethren.”

Once again, we would call attention to the truth here exemplified: We cannot enter into our inheritance without fighting. See how the two aspects combine: The eastern country of the Jordan had already been allotted and given to the two and a half tribes—but *they* must now bear their share in the conquest of Canaan. Nay, they must take the lead in the fighting: “*Ye shall pass before your brethren armed*” (Jos 1:14)—they were to form the ‘spearhead’ of Israel's army. See the meetness and justice of that arrangement: They had obtained their inheritance *before* any of their brethren, and so they must be in the van.¹ And thus, it came to pass: When the Jordan was crossed, the two and

¹ **van** – the front line of an army in battle (vanguard).

a half tribes “passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them” (Jos 4:12). Observe it was “the mighty men of valour” (Jos 1:14) who did so—there were no women in the ‘forces’!

“And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses” (Jos 1:16-17). If we wrote a separate article on these verses, we should entitle it, “Joshua’s encouragement” and dwell upon the relation between this incident, and that which precedes. It is ever God’s way to honour those who honour Him. Joshua had promptly complied with his commission and had magnified God’s Word; and now He moved those two and a half tribes to willingly serve under him. In his words, “Until the LORD have given your brethren rest...and they also have possessed the land” (Jos 1:15), he had spoken in unwavering faith as to the outcome; and now the Lord graciously inclined these men to fully co-operate with him.

Those two and a half tribes might have pleaded that their agreement had been made with *Moses*; and that since death cancels all contracts, his decease released them from their engagement. But instead, they averred their unqualified readiness to accept Joshua as their leader and yield to his authority. Their promise to him went beyond what they had pledged unto Moses. Joshua had received the assurance, “Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:9); and in His moving those two and a half tribes to loyal subjection unto Joshua, He gave the initial manifestation and earnest of His fulfilment of the same. Their promise to Joshua on this occasion was no idle boast, for as Joshua 22:1-6 shows, they faithfully kept their word. “Only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses” (Jos 1:17) should be regarded as their prayer for him.

“Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:18). They suggested that this military edict should be enacted in order to prevent cowardice and disloyalty on the part of others in the army, implying their readiness to co-operate in the enforcing of the same. It is probable that they had in mind the Lord’s word unto Moses, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will *require it of him*” (Deu 18:18-19). We know that prophecy received its ultimate fulfilment in Christ, but Joshua was a type of Him. “Only be strong and of a good courage” was tantamount to their declaring, “We, for our part, will do nothing to weaken thy hands, but on the contrary, will do all in our power to make thy lot easier!” Such should ever be the attitude of the Christian unto both magistrates and the ministers of the Gospel.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

12. Its Evidences

What are the principal marks of spiritual growth? What are the outstanding characteristics of the Christian’s progress? To some of our readers, that may appear a simple question, admitting of a ready answer. From one standpoint, that is so; yet if we are to view it in its proper perspective, careful consideration is called for ere we make reply. If we bear in mind the real nature of spiritual growth and remember it is like that of a tree—downward as well as upward; inward as well as outward—we shall be preserved from mere generalisations. If, too, we take into account the three grades under which Christians are grouped, we shall be careful to distinguish between those things which, respectively, evidence growth in the “babes,” in the “young men,” and in the “fathers” in Christ. That which is suited to and marks the growth of a babe in Christ applies not unto one who has reached a more advanced form in His school; and that which characterizes the full-grown Christian is not to be looked for in the immature one. It follows, then, that certain distinctions must be drawn, if a definite and detailed answer is to be furnished unto our opening inquiry.

But since we have already written at some length on the three grades of Christian development, and have sought to describe those features which pertain more distinctively unto those in the stage of the “blade,” the “ear,” and “the full corn in the ear,” there is no need for us now to go over the same ground. If it be borne in mind that growth is a *relative* thing, we shall see that the same unit of measurement is not applicable to all cases—as the yardstick is the best means for gauging the growth of children, but the weighing-scales for registering that of adults. Then, too, if we take into consideration, as we should, differences of privilege and opportunity, of teaching and training, of station and circumstances, a uniform progress should not be expected. Some believers have much more to contend against than others. It is not that we would limit the grace of God, but that we should recognise and take into account the distinctions which Scripture itself draws. The relative growth of one who is severely handicapped may be much greater in reality than that of another who, in more favourable circumstances, makes greater progress.

The man who plants a fruit tree in a fertile valley is warranted to expect a better yield from it than one which is set in the soil of an exposed hillside. When a young Christian is favoured with pious parents, or brothers and sisters who encourage him both by counsel and example, how much more may be looked for from him than another who dwells in the home of the ungodly. An unmarried woman who does not have to earn her living has much more opportunity for reading, meditation, prayer, and the nurture of her spiritual life, than one who has the care of a young family. One who is privileged to sit regularly under an edifying ministry has better opportunity for Christian progress, than another who is denied such a privilege. Again, the man with two talents cannot produce as much as another with five, yet if the former gain another two by them, he does just as well proportionately as the one who makes his five into ten. The Lord Himself takes note of such differences: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luk 12:48).

Let us also point out that we are not now going to write upon the marks or signs of spiritual life as such, but rather, of the evidences of the *growth* of spiritual life—a much harder task. When we endeavour to examine ourselves for them, it is of great importance that we should know *what* to look for. If the Christian expects to find an improvement in the “old man,” he will most certainly be disappointed: If he looks for a waning of natural pride, a lessening of the workings of unbelief, a cessation of the risings within him of rebellion against God, he will look in vain. Yet how many Christians *are* bitterly disappointed over this very thing and greatly cast down by the same. But they ought not to be—for God has nowhere promised to sublimate or spiritualise the “flesh” nor to eradicate our corruptions in this life—yet it is the Christian’s duty and privilege to so “walk in the Spirit” that he “shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). Though we should be deeply humbled over our corruptions and mourn for them, yet our painful awareness of the same should not cause us to conclude we have made no spiritual growth.

An increasing realization of our native depravity, a growing discovery of how much there is within us that is opposed to God—with a corresponding despising of ourselves for the same—is one of the surest evidences that we are growing in grace. The more the light of God shines into our hearts, the more are we made aware of the filth and wickedness which indwell them. The better we become acquainted with God and learn of His ineffable purity, the more conscious do we become of our base impurity and bewail the same. That is a growing downwards, or becoming less in our own esteem. And it is *that* which makes way for an increasing valuation of the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, and a more frequent betaking of ourselves to that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Thus, if Christ is becoming more precious unto you, if you perceive with increasing clearness His suitability for such a vile wretch as you know yourself to be, and if that perception leads you to cast yourself more and more upon Him—as a drowning man does to a log—then that is clear proof you are growing in grace.

Growth is silent, and at the same time, imperceptible to our senses—though later, it is evident. Growth is gradual; and full development is not reached in a day, nor in a year. Time must be allowed before proof can be obtained. We should not attempt to gauge our growth by our feelings, but rather, by looking into the glass of God’s Word and measuring ourselves by the standard which is there set before us. There may be real progress, even where there be less inward comforts. Am I denying myself more now than I did formerly? Am I less enthralled by the attractions of this world than I used to be? Are the details of my daily life being more strictly regulated by the precepts of Holy Writ? Am I more resigned to the blessed will of God, assured that He knows what is best for me? Is my confidence in God growing, so that I am more and more leaving myself and my affairs in His hands? Those are some of the tests we should apply to ourselves, if we would ascertain whether or not we be growing in grace.

1. Consider *the work of mortification* and seek to ascertain what proficiency you are making therein. There can be no progress in the Christian life while that work be unattended to. God does not remove indwelling sin from His people, but He does require them to make no provision unto its lusts, to resist its strivings, and to deny its solicitations. His call is: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5). “Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). “Abstain from flesh-

ly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11). “Keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21). That is the lifelong task God has assigned us: For as long as we remain in this body, the flesh will oppose from within; and the world, from without. If we become slack in the performance of this duty, sin and Satan will gain more and more of an advantage over us. But if we be faithful and diligent therein, our efforts—by the Spirit’s enablement—will not be altogether in vain.

But most of our readers—perhaps all of them—will exclaim, But his is the very matter in which I meet with most discouragement; and if I am honest, it appears to me that my efforts are utterly in vain. Despite my utmost endeavours, my lusts still master me, and I am repeatedly brought into captivity by sin. Though such be the case, that goes not to show your efforts were useless. God has nowhere promised that if you do so and so, indwelling sin shall become inoperative, or that your lusts shall become weaker and weaker. There is widespread misunderstanding on this subject. The word “mortify” signifies “put to death,” but it must be carefully borne in mind that it is used *figuratively* and not literally—for it is a physical term applied to what is immaterial. Through no possible process can the Christian—not with the Spirit’s help—render his lusts *lifeless*. They may at times appear so to his consciousness, yet it will not be long ere he is again aware that they are vigorous and active. The holiest of God’s people, in all ages, have borne testimony to the power and prevalency of their corruptions; and that, to their last hour.

It needs then to be carefully defined what is meant by the word “mortify.” Since it does not signify, “slay or extinguish indwelling sin” nor “render lifeless your lusts,” what is intended? This: Die unto them in your affections, your intentions, your resolutions, your efforts. We mortify sin by detesting it: “Whosoever *hateth* his brother is a *murderer*” (1Jo 3:15); and just so far as we really hate our corruptions, have we morally slain them. The Christian evidences his hatred of sin by mourning when it has gained an advantage over him. If it be his sincere intention and honest resolution to subdue every rising of his native depravity and the commission of every sin, then in the sight of Him who accepts the will for the deed, he *has* “mortified” them. Whenever the believer contritely confesses his sins unto God and “forsakes” them, so far as any purpose to repeat them is concerned, he *has* “mortified” them. If he truly loathes, grieves over, and acknowledges his failures unto God, then he can say, “that which I do I *allow not*” (Rom 7:15).

“The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1Sa 16:7) needs to be borne in mind on this subject. “If a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die” (Deu 22:25). In the verses which follow, we read, “there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death” (Deu 22:26). Not only did she not consent hereto, but we are told “the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her” (Deu 22:27). Now, that has a spiritual application to us. If a believer be suddenly surprised by a temptation which is unto something forbidden by God, and his heart agrees not thereunto—but he offers a resistance, which is, however, unavailing—though he be not guiltless therein, yet his case is very different from that of the unregenerate who found the temptation agreeable and responded heartily thereto. Note how the Spirit has recorded of Joseph of Arimathea, that though he was a member of the Sanhedrin which condemned Christ to death, yet “the same had *not consented* to the counsel and deed of them” (Luk 23:51)!

“What is sanctification? Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they *more and more die unto sin* and rise unto newness of life” (Westminster Catechism). The words we have emphasized have occasioned much grief and anxiety unto many—for measuring themselves by them, they concluded they had never been sanctified. But it should be noted, it is not there said that “*sin* is more and more dying in them,” but that *they* “more and more die *unto sin*”—which is a very different thing. Christians do, as pointed out above, die more and more unto sin in their affections, intentions, and efforts. Yet we fail to find any warrant in Scripture for saying, “the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened.”

Having sought to show what the word “mortify” does not denote in its application to the Christian’s conflict with sin—and what it does signify—let us, in a few words, point out wherein the believer may be said to be making progress in this essential work. He is progressing therein when he girds himself more diligently and resolutely unto this task, refusing to allow seeming failure therein to cause him to give up in despair. He is making progress therein as he learns to make conscience of things which the world condemns not, by being regulated by God’s Word, rather than public opinion, or leaning unto his own understanding. He is making progress therein when he obtains a clear insight of spiritual corruptions, so that he is exercised not only over worldly lusts and gross evils, but over coldness

of heart, unbelief, pride, impatience, self-confidence; and thus, he would cleanse himself from all filthiness of “spirit,” as well as “of the flesh” (2Co 7:1). In short, he is growing in grace, if he be maintaining a stricter and more regular watch over his heart.

2. Consider *the work of living unto God* and seek to ascertain in what proficiency you are making therein. The measure and constancy of our yieldedness and devotedness unto God is another criterion by which we may ascertain whether or not we be really growing in grace—for to lapse into a course of self-pleasing is a sure symptom of backsliding. Am I increasingly giving up myself unto God, employing my faculties and powers in seeking to please and glorify Him? Am I endeavouring, with intensified earnestness and diligence, to act in accordance with the surrender I made of myself to Him at my conversion, and to the dedication of myself to His service at my baptism? Am I finding deeper delight therein, or is His service becoming irksome? If the latter, then that is clear proof that I have deteriorated—for there has been no change in Him, nor in His claims upon me. If love be healthy, then my greatest joy will be in making Him my chief Object and supreme End; but if I seek to do so only from a sense of obligation and duty, then my love has cooled.

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Probably that means, in part at least, Let no compartment of your complex being be reserved or retained for *self*, but desire and pray that God may possess you wholly. Is that the deepest longing and endeavour of your heart? Are you finding increasing pleasure in the will and ways of the Lord? Then you are following on to know Him. Are you making a more determined and continuous effort to “Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10)? Then that evidences you are growing in grace. Are you less influenced than formerly by how others think and act, and requiring nothing less than a “Thus saith the Lord” for your monitor? Then you are becoming more rooted and grounded in the Faith. Are you more watchful against those things which would break, or at least chill, your communion with God? Then you are going forward in the Christian life.

To be increasingly devoted unto God requires that I be increasingly occupied and absorbed with Him. To that end, I need to daily study the revelation which He has made of Himself in the Scriptures, and particularly in Christ. I need also to meditate frequently upon His wondrous perfections: His amazing grace, unfathomable love, His ineffable holiness, His unchanging faithfulness, His mighty power, His infinite longsufferance. If I contemplate Him thus with the eyes of faith and love, then shall I be able to say, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD [the place of nearness and fellowship with Him] all the days of my life, to behold the *beauty* of the LORD” (Psa 27:4). The one who can do that must perforce exclaim, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). That, my reader, is not a mere rhetorical utterance, but the language of one whose heart has been won by the Lord.

3. Consider *the Word of God* and seek to measure yourself by the degree in which you really *honour it*. What place do the contents of the Sacred Volume have in your affections, thoughts, and life: a higher one than formerly, or not? Is that divine communication more valued by you today than when you were first converted? Are you more fully assured of its divine inspiration, so that Satan himself could not make you doubt its Authorship? Are you more solemnly impressed by its authority, so that at times, you tremble before it? Does the Truth come with greater weight, so that your heart and conscience is more deeply impressed by it? Are more of its very words treasured up in your memory and frequently meditated upon? Are you really feeding upon it: appropriating it unto yourself, mixing faith therewith, and being nourished by it? Are you learning to make it your Shield, on which you catch and quench the fiery darts of the wicked? Are you like the Bereans (Act 17:11), bringing to this infallible Scale and weighing therein all you read and hear?

Carefully bear in mind the purpose for which the Scriptures were given to us, the particular benefits they are designed to bestow. They are “profitable for doctrine” (2Ti 3:16), and *their* doctrine is far more than a theological treatise addressed to the intellect or a philosophical system which furnishes an explanation of man’s origin, constitution, and relation to God. It is “the doctrine which is according to *godliness*” (1Ti 6:3)—every part of which is designed to exalt God and abase man according to Him, His rightful place over us, and our dependence upon and subjection to Him. It is profitable “for reproof,” to acquaint us with our innumerable faults and failures, and to admonish us for the same. It is “a *discerner* of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12), probing into our innermost beings and condemning all within us which is impure. It is profitable “for correction,” to teach us what is right and pleasing unto God; and such is its potency that the more we are regulated by it, the more are our souls renovated and purified. It is profitable “for instruction in righteousness,” for producing integrity of character and conduct. It is for the enlightening of our minds, the instructing of our consciences, the regulating of our wills.

Now, my reader, test yourself by those considerations, fairly and impartially. Are you finding the Scriptures increasingly profitable for “the doctrine which is according to godliness”? If so, they are producing in you a deeper

and more extensive piety. Are you more and more opening your heart unto their “reproof,” not confining yourself to those portions which comfort, and avoiding those parts which admonish and condemn you? If so, then you are cultivating closer dealings with God. Are you increasingly desirous of being “corrected” by their searching and holy teachings? If so, then you diligently endeavour to promptly put right whatever they show is wrong in you. Are they really instructing you in righteousness, so that your deportment is becoming in the fuller conformity to their standard? If so, you are more shunned by worldlings and less esteemed by empty professors. Do you frequently examine yourself by God’s Word and test your experience by its teaching? If so, you are becoming more skilled in the Word of Righteousness (Heb 5:13) and more pleasing unto its Author.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

10. Its Results

In the previous articles, we have shown at some length the need for and the nature of reconciliation being effected between God and those who have broken His Law. We have dwelt upon the amazing fact that, though He was the One wronged, yet God took the initiative and is the Author of recovering the rebellious unto Himself. We have seen how that project engaged His eternal counsels in the Everlasting Covenant; and that therein, His wisdom found a way whereby His love might flow forth unto the guilty without any sully of His holiness or flouting of His justice, and how that the Son fully concurred in the Father’s counsels and voluntarily performed the stupendous work in order to their accomplishment. We have already considered that which God requires from sinners, if they are to become actual participants of the good of Christ’s mediation and personally “*receive* the atonement” (Rom 5:11), or reconciliation. We are, therefore, now ready to contemplate the “results” or fruits of that reconciliation—the consequences which follow from the new relation to God and His Law, which the sinner enters into upon his repentance and saving acceptance of the Gospel.

Causes and their effects need ever to be distinguished if we are to obtain something more than a vague and general idea of the things with which they are concerned. It is by confounding principles and their products that so many are confused. As we have shown in previous articles, reconciliation is one of the principal results which issue from the sacrifice of Christ. Strictly speaking, it has a fourfold cause. The will of the Father, or His eternal counsels, was its *originating* cause. The mediation of the incarnate Son is its *meritorious* and procuring cause. The work of the Spirit in the souls of the elect is the *efficient* cause—for it is by His gracious and invincible operations they are capacitated to do that which God requires of them, before they become actual partakers of the benefits of Christ’s mediation. The repentance and faith of the awakened and convicted sinner is the *instrumental* cause, whereby he is reconciled to God. We say that reconciliation is one of the principal results from Christ’s sacrifice—redemption, remission, and sanctification are others; and they are all so intimately related that it is not easy to prevent an overlapping of them in our thoughts. But in what follows, we shall treat, mainly, not of the effect of Christ’s redemptive work, but rather the results of reconciliation itself.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of any single statement in Holy Writ concerning the outcome of reconciliation is found in that brief, but pregnant word: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*” (1Pe 3:18). “Bring us to God” is a general expression for the whole benefit which ensues from reconciliation, including the removal of all obstacles and impediments, and the bestowment of all requisites and blessings. Formerly, there was a legal hostility and moral dissimilarity between God and us, with the want of intercourse and fellowship; but now, those who were once “far off are made nigh” (Eph 2:13). In consequence of what Christ did and suffered, His people have been enstated into life, brought into the favour of God, become partakers of the nature of God, have restored to them the image of God, are given access to God, are favoured to have communion with Him, and will yet enjoy the eternal and ineffable vision of Him. Let that serve as our outline.

1. The initial consequence of our reconciliation to God by Christ is that we have life: *a life in Law*. That is an aspect of our subject, which, fundamental though it be, has received scarcely any attention from theologians and Bible teachers. It is one which is familiar to few of God’s people, and therefore, calls for both explanation and elaboration. By our sin and fall in Adam, we died legally, our life-in-law was lost, for we came under its curse. The divine Judge had threatened our federal head: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17)

and “in Adam all die” (1Co 15:22). The case of each descendant of his upon entering this world is like that of a murderer in the condemned cell—awaiting the hour of execution, unless he be reprieved. We are, by nature, “the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3); and until we savingly believe in the Son, “the wrath of God abideth” (Joh 3:36) on us. We have no life in Law, no title to its award, but are transgressors; and as such, under its death sentence—“condemned already” (Joh 3:18).

The consequence of Adam’s dying legally was that he also died spiritually; that is, his soul became vitiated and depraved: he lost the moral image of God, and the capacity to enjoy Him or please Him. Legal death and spiritual death are quite distinct (Joh 5:24); the latter being entailed by the former. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men” (Rom 5:12)—not simply “entered into” all men, but “passed *upon*” them as a judicial sentence. “By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18): The guilt of the federal head was imputed unto all he represented—evidenced by so many dying in infancy, for since even physical death is part of the wages of sin and infants having not personally committed any, they must be suffering the consequences of the sin of another. But Adam died spiritually, as well as legally; and his depravity is imparted to all his descendants, so that they enter this world both legally and spiritually “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18).

Now it is only by Christ, “the last Adam” (1Co 15:45), that we can regain life, either legally or spiritually. That they obtain *spiritual* life from Christ, is well understood by the saint; but His having secured for them a life *in Law*, most of them are quite ignorant about. Yet Romans 5 is very emphatic on the point: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one [i.e. a single transgression]; much more they which receive abundance of grace [to meet not only the original, but their own innumerable transgressions] and of the gift of righteousness [i.e. the imputed obedience of Christ] shall *reign in life* by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification *of life*” (Rom 5:17-18)—note well that last clause: *not* “the free gift entered into all men unto regeneration of life.” Justification is entirely a *legal* matter and concerns our status before the Lawgiver. As God’s elect lost their life in law through the disobedience of their first federal head, so the obedience of their last Federal Head has secured for them a life in law.

Christ is the Fountain of life unto all His spiritual seed; and that, not as the second Person in the Trinity, but as the God-man Mediator. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19), which has reference to Christ *officially*, and not essentially. Failure to grasp that truth has resulted in some verses of Scripture being grievously misunderstood and misinterpreted, to the dishonouring of our blessed Lord. For instance, when He declared, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (Joh 5:26), He was there speaking of Himself as incarnate. As God the Son, co-essential and co-glorious with the Father, He *always had* “life in himself”—“in him *was* life” (Joh 1:4), which refers to His essential person *before* He became incarnate. But as God-man Mediator, the Father gave Him “*to have* life in himself” (Joh 5:26): He gave Him a mediatorial life and fulness of His people. “As thou hast *given him* power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (Joh 17:2) presents the same aspect of Truth—Christ was there speaking as the Mediator, as is evident from His high priestly prayer which immediately follows.

“As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (Joh 6:57). That title, “the living Father” respects Him in connection with the economy of redemption and expresses His supremacy over the *office* of His Son, as the One who covenanted and set Him forth on His grand mission. In His Godhead, the Son has life—has it essentially, originally, independently in Himself, as a Person co-eternal with the Father. But as Mediator, the life which Christ lived and lives unto God—and which, in the discharge of His mediatorial office, He bestows on His people—is *derived* from and is *dependent* upon the will of the Father; for in office, the Son is lower than and inferior to the Father—in *that* respect, and in *that only*, “my Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28), He declared. In affirming that “I live *by* the Father” (Joh 6:57), Christ signified that His mediatorial life was *sustained* by the Father. Let it be clearly understood that in John 6:57, the Lord Jesus was speaking of Himself *officially*, *mediatorially*, and not essentially as God the Son.

“I live by the Father” (Joh 6:57). The Father prepared a body for Him (Heb 10:5), and all the days of His flesh was upholding Him by the right hand of His righteousness. Christ definitely acknowledged this again and again, both by the Spirit of prophecy and by His ministerial utterances: “Thou *maintainest* my lot...I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psa 16:5, 8). “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will *help* me; therefore shall I not be confounded” (Isa 50:6-7). “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (Joh 6:38). “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?”

the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (Joh 14:10). “As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31). In all these passages, He spake as the dependent One, the Mediator.

By purchase, Christ *ratified* His title to the mediatorial life: “Now the God of peace [the propitiated and the reconciled One], that brought again from the dead [not “the” but] *our* Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20). It was neither as God the Son, nor as the God-man considered as a *private* person, that God raised Him; but as the God-man Mediator and Surety of His people—by His own essential power (also) Christ emerged from the tomb: John 2:19; 10:17. By the right of conquest, Christ *secured* the mediatorial life, being made a royal priest “after the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16). “He *asked* life of thee” (compare Psalm 2:8!): “Thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever” (Psa 21:4). He had an official right and title to life, because He had magnified the law and made it honourable (Isa 42:21)—magnified it by rendering to it a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience in thought, word, and deed; and that, as the God-man Mediator. “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall *live* by them” (Rom 10:5).

It has not been sufficiently recognised that the converse of “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) is “the award of obedience is life”! The first man violated the Law, and therefore, suffered its penalty; but the last Man fulfilled the Law, and therefore, obtained a right to its reward. Christ found the Commandment “ordained to life” (Rom 7:10); and it was for that life (the reward of the Law) He “asked” (Psa 21:4), and which He received (Heb 7:16) after He had vanquished death. Christ “reign[s] in life” (Rom 5:17), in “justification of life” (Rom 5:18; and compare Isa 50:8 and 1Ti 3:16). Christ now “liveth unto God” (Rom 6:10); and He does so as the last Adam, as our Representative. Christ’s life in law is also that of His people: “Christ, who is our life” (Col 3:4). Christ is the sole fountain of life, the source from which our life—both legal and spiritual—flows. It is for this reason that the scroll on which the names of God’s elect is inscribed is called, “the Lamb’s book *of life*” (Rev 21:27). It is the Mediator’s book for “the Lamb,” which is always expressive of Christ as the Priest and sacrifice of His people; and it is His mediatorial life which He shares with us.

The antithesis of sin is righteousness—for as sin is the transgression of the Law (1Jo 3:4), so righteousness is “rightness,” or measuring up to the standard of right, and therefore, consists of fulfilling the Law. And since the God-man Mediator perfectly obeyed it, we are told that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4). Now just as sin and death cannot be separated, so righteousness and life are indivisible. A further appeal to Romans 5 establishes that: “They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of *righteousness* shall *reign in life* by one, Jesus Christ...by the *righteousness* of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of *life*...That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by [‘in’] Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:17-18, 21)—in each case, it is a premial life, or one of reward from the Law. “Christ, who is our life” (Col 3:4): apart from Him, we have no standing before the Law, no title to its award; but being federally and judicially one with Him, then that which was due Him in return for His perfect fulfilment of the Law’s requirements is due those whom He represented.

Far too little attention has been paid to the first member in the antithesis presented in Deuteronomy 28—namely, that “all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be...Blessed shalt be...Blessed shalt be...Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out” (Deu 28:2-6)—which is set over against: “But...if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments...that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee” etc. (Deu 28:15). Just as surely as the Law pronounces a curse on those who break it, so the Law pronounces a blessing on those who keep it: the curse is death, and the blessing is life; and that blessing, the God-man Mediator obtained as the Surety of His people. As Christ is objectively and by imputation “our righteousness,” so He is objectively and by imputation “our life.” By Christ, those who are reconciled to God have life in law; and that is the foundation of all the other results or consequences of their restoration to His judicial favour.

2. *Pardon from God.* “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:19). The trespasses of God’s penitent and believing people are not charged against them, because His wisdom discovered a way by which He might be fully recompensed for the wrong which our sins did unto His majesty—by imputing them to our Substitute and exacting vengeance upon Him for the same. Our iniquities were laid upon Him; and because of them, He suffered “the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18). That which was the ground of reconciliation was likewise the ground of the pardon of our iniquities: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7). Remission was the ransom-price which Christ paid unto God’s justice; and therefore, a principal part of our reconciliation is the remission of our

sins. Remission of sins means that the guilt and condemnation of them is cancelled, and therefore, that we are released from the penalty and punishment of them; and that, because the punishment was borne by Christ and God's wrath appeased.

Now observe how inseparably connected is the pardon of the believer's sins with his possessing a life in law before God. As we have shown above, obedience to the Law (in the person of our Surety) is righteousness; and where there is righteousness, the Law bestows *blessing*, as surely as it pronounces a curse on all unrighteousness. Now, what does the blessing of the Law consist of? Negatively, that it has naught against us; and where that be the case, none can truly "lay any thing to [our] charge" (Rom 8:33). Positively, that it pronounces us righteous; and as such, entitled to this award and blessing. Hence, we are told, "*Blessed* is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. *Blessed* is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (Psa 32:1-2). Yet we need to be on our guard against drawing a false inference from this: As Christians, we still transgress, and therefore, need to beg for daily forgiveness, as well as for daily bread, as Matthew 6:12 plainly shows. As Christ is required to ask and sue out the fruits of His mediation (Psa 2:8), so we are enjoined to humbly sue out our right of forgiveness (Jer 3:12; 1Jo 1:9).

3. *Peace with God*. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). This verse has been commonly misunderstood, through supposing the "peace" there mentioned to be that which is subjective, rather than objective. The verse is not speaking about that peace of conscience when assured of divine forgiveness, when the burden of our sins is removed and left at the foot of the cross, nor to that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phi 4:7) that keeps the hearts and minds of God's children when they are "careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication" let their "requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6); but to "peace *with* God." It is not a state of mind, but a *relation* to the Lawgiver which is in view. It is not tranquility of heart, but that relation which arises from the expiation of sin and consequent justification. "Peace with God" means that He no longer regards us as His enemies in the objective sense of the term, but are now the objects of His favour: It is that state of things which ensues from the cessation of hostilities. It means that the sword of divine justice, which smote our Shepherd (Zec 13:7), is now forever sheathed.

"Peace *with* God" means that we are no longer the objects of His displeasure, and therefore, that we no more have any cause to dread the divine vengeance. If due attention be paid to the first clause of Romans 5:1, there should be no difficulty in understanding the second: the illative "therefore" pointing the connection. In the previous chapters, the apostle had proved that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), that they are guilty and under the condemnation of His Law. They are, therefore, viewed by Him as "enemies" (Rom 5:10); and as such, they are "without strength" (Rom 5:6) or ability to help themselves. In blessed contrast therefrom, in Romans 5:1-11, the apostle described at length the glorious status and state of those who are justified by faith. Justification imports the forgiveness of sins (Rom 4:5-7), and that imports "peace with God"—that He is reconciled to us, that He no longer frowns, but smiles upon us. To "peace with God" is added "through our Lord Jesus Christ"—*not* "by the operation of the Holy Spirit," as *had* been the case, if peace of conscience had been in view. As Christ is "our life" (Col 3:4) objectively and legally, so He is "our peace" (Eph 2:14) objectively and legally.

Just as spiritual life wrought in our souls through regeneration is the consequence of the legal life which we have in Christ, so inward peace—or the purging of our consciences from dead works—follows from the peace which Christ made by "the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20), though the measure of our inward peace is largely determined by the daily exercise of our *faith* (Rom 15:13). Here again, we may perceive how intimately one result is linked with another. The antitypical Melchizedek is first "King of righteousness," and then "King of peace" (Heb 7:2). "The work of righteousness shall be peace"—that is, the mediatorial work of Christ shall produce "peace with God"; "and the effect of righteousness [as it is apprehended by faith] quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa 32:17). "We have peace with God" because "the chastisement of our peace [Hebrew "peaces"] was upon him" (Isa 53:5): Peace here and hereafter—objectively and subjectively—with God and in the conscience, the whole corrective or punishment which produced them was laid upon Christ. "By submitting to those chastisements, Christ slew the enmity and settled an amity between God and man...and God not only saves us from ruin, but takes us into friendship...Christ was in pain, that we might be at ease" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

JUNE

COMMANDED SUBJECTION

The longer this writer lives, the more deeply is he convinced that the Scriptures cannot possibly be of human origination, but are divinely inspired. Many and varied are the considerations which contribute unto that conviction, among them being the wondrous *balance* of God's Word, a balance which is both unique and perfect. Though the Word forbids a believer to be subject unto any who usurp authority; yet it is far from teaching that he is a law unto himself, independent of others, not to be subordinate unto any save God Himself. As it is in nature, so it is in grace: God has constituted us so that, to a considerable extent, we are mutually dependent. Those on the land are much indebted unto those who man the ships and sail the seas. The factories cannot turn out their products unless the miners go down into the pits and hew coal for the furnaces. This magazine could not be published and circulated abroad, unless paper were manufactured, ink made, the printing press manned, and the post office operated. No man liveth unto himself, naturally or spiritually. God has appointed the evangelist to carry the Gospel to the perishing, and the pastor to feed His sheep. He who has made us sociable creatures naturally, "setteth the solitary in families" (Psa 68:6) spiritually.

Nay more: If God has constituted the human family that its members are dependent one upon another, so has He made them beholden to those who occupy a *lower grade* in the scale of creation—having to turn unto the animals for much of our food and clothing, and even to inanimate nature for materials, out of which to manufacture the necessary implements to work with. It is the same with those who belong to His spiritual family, who are likened by Him unto the organs of our body: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (1Co 12:21-22). Even those whom God has called to minister spiritual things unto His people are themselves supported temporally by the contributions of those unto whom they minister. Thus, does He stain pride! If then believers are forbidden to call any man "father" or "master" in a sense of suffering him to dominate the conscience or domineer over the life, yet they are also commanded, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21).

"We are all Popes by nature, and every man is prone to claim to himself an infallible chair, to the decisions of which, if others oppose themselves, he is ready to throw out angry bulls and 'bitter words'; yet the Spirit puts this papal spirit down within His children, and tells them not to domineer, but to sit meekly at the Master's feet, or to walk humbly in the sense of their own weakness and dependence upon Him" (Ambrose Serle, 1742-1812). Though the first part of that statement be somewhat of a sweeping generalization, yet there is no doubt it is true of the majority of us. All are not cast in the same mould or born with a like temperament—some having disposition and determination to take the lead; others preferring to have their thinking and planning done for them and be led. But while some are naturally meek and mild, yielding and submissive, a far greater number are aggressive and self-assertive. Though divine grace moderates and regulates our natural characteristics, yet it does not obliterate them; and therefore, unto one class, the call is given: "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1Co 16:13); unto another, the word is: "Put on...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness" (Col 3:12).

As the Christian must not degenerate into the slave of a religious dictator, neither must he cultivate a spirit of arrogance, self-sufficiency, and self-superiority. Here, as everywhere, the teaching of Holy Writ preserves the balance. The Gospel of Christ neither inculcates a servile spirit on the one side, nor does it tolerate an arbitrary and despotic bearing on the other. If God has given to the individual Christian the right of private judgment, bidding him to "prove all things" (1Th 5:21) for himself, He has also told him, "he that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul" (Pro 15:32); and He enjoins us all to cultivate a meek and teachable spirit, so that we are willing and ready to learn things even from a child. If the Saviour bade His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Mat 16:6, 11), and warned them against cherishing their tyrannical spirit, yet He also said unto them, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

But it shall *not be so among you*” (Mat 20:25-26). The righteous are indeed “bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1); nevertheless, an essential part of the spiritual fruit borne by them is “longsuffering, gentleness...meekness” (Gal 5:22-23).

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21). At first glance, it would seem that such a precept is contradictory, or at least paradoxical, for how is it practicable for all the members of a well-ordered church to practise *mutual* submission? Or if Christians be considered in their natural and social relations, both unto each other and unto their fellow-creatures, how can such an injunction be carried out? Must the husband submit to his wife, as well as the wife to her husband; is the father to defer to his children, as well as they render obedience to him; is the master to be submissive to his servant? Does this exhortation reduce all of the saints to one common level, thereby eliminating all order, grades, and government among them? Certainly not, as the verses that immediately follow plainly show. The grace of God in regeneration cancels no natural tie, but rather brings it under a new and higher sanction. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28) is very far from teaching that the new birth obliterates all natural distinctions. But grace *does* put down pride and forbids all assertions of superiority, enjoining mutual submission.

Before seeking to remove the apparent difficulty presented by Ephesians 5:21, let us point out that this verse is far from standing alone; rather is the Christian duty there specified enforced again and again in the New Testament. It came first from the lips of our Lord to His disciples: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mat 20:26-28)—meekness and lowliness is to characterize the followers of the Lamb. “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom 12:10)—not aspiring after and contending for superiority. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) expresses in slightly different language the selfsame Christian duty. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phi 2:3-4). How very different things would be among the Lord’s people if we all complied with the above rules!

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1Pe 5:5). Ah, does not *that* explain the seeming paradox in Ephesians 5:21! If only we were “clothed with humility,” there would be no difficulty in understanding and no obstacle in the way of the outworking of the “all of you be subject one to another.” It is another case where the heart, rather than the head, is needed for interpreting. If *love* be mutual exercise, all will be plain, simple, and delightful. But our subject is too important, too much needed—by writer and reader alike—to dismiss so briefly, so we hope to amplify this in a further article in a later issue.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

30. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 6

“That ye...may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:17-19) was the third petition in this wondrous prayer. Is not the reader at once struck with the difference between this request, and the nature of one which he is accustomed to hearing in public prayers—and one which very likely he, himself, frequently makes use of? How many of God’s people are wont to ask for an increase of *their* love to Christ. Yet not so did the apostle here pray. We generally ask for more *enjoyment* of Christ’s love to us, but even that is not what Paul directly made supplication for. His request was that we might have a fuller comprehension and a deeper knowledge of *His* love, and we may be sure that he prayed aright, and therefore, that it is our wisdom to follow his example. That to which we have just called attention supplies a further illustration of what we not infrequently point out in these pages—namely, that man ever reverses God’s order; and of course, he is the loser thereby. It is by faith’s occupation with the infinite love of Christ and meditations upon its characteristics and manifestations that our poor love is increased. May we not legitimately apply here those words, “while I was musing [on His love] the fire burned” (Psa 39:3)—in my heart!

That for which the apostle here made request was that God's people might have a more spiritual and enlarged view of the immeasurable love of Christ, that their understandings might be swallowed up in it, that their renewed minds might be more and more filled with the wonders of it, and that they should enter into a deeper experimental acquaintance with the same. All the discoveries which the Holy Spirit makes unto us of the love of Christ are in the Word and by the Word, and we are brought to a spiritual discernment thereof by the exercise of faith thereon. Christ's love only becomes to us a subject of apprehension, as it is evidenced in its manifestations; and we only obtain a spiritual knowledge thereof as we personally drink of it. Even the renewed understanding is not able of itself to grasp the surpassing love of Christ, but the understanding led by the *heart* can lay hold of it and find in it fuller satisfaction. Though necessarily imperfect and incomplete, the Christian's knowledge of Christ's love is real and ravishing; and it should be constantly deepening and enlarging. It "passeth knowledge" not only because it is infinite, and therefore, incomprehensible to the finite mind, but also because our personal experience and enjoyment of the same can never exhaust it—we do but touch its edges and skim its surface.

We have intimated somewhat in the last paragraph what we regard as the difference between "comprehending" and "knowing." Perhaps it was no part of the Spirit's design that we should draw any broad line between them, but so far as we can perceive, it seems to us that the "comprehending" is via the understanding, the "knowing" via the heart—the former being more the result of mental effort; the other, of intuition. Thus, to "know"—in addition to "comprehend"—is to have a feeling sense of the love of Christ, or an experimental acquaintance with it: Though it transcends the grasp of our intellect, yet it is a subject of inward consciousness; though it can be but faintly recognised, it may be adoringly appreciated. As the Spirit graciously takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, as He opens to us more and more the love of Christ by His own effectual teaching, and as He opens our minds in a gradual and imperceptible way to understand, to exercise our thoughts upon it, we enjoy the same in our hearts. That knowledge being formed within becomes a spiritual part of us, so that what we read in the Word concerning the love of Christ we *know* the truth thereof, for we have the reality of it within our own souls.

"To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:19). We do not agree with those who say that is the language of paradox; rather is it a plain statement of fact. We may, we can, we do know the love of Christ, in the sense explained above: We believe it, we experience it, we enjoy it as a blessed and glorious reality. Yet our knowledge is but inadequate and imperfect—for being infinite, the love of Christ can never be entirely compassed, explored, or exhausted by us. As Sam E. Pierce pointed out: "All that is known of the love of Christ in and by all the saints on earth: all that is known and enjoyed of the love of Christ by all the saints in heaven, is far below what is contained in the person and love of Christ, as considered in His own heart towards us. I have, under this view of the subject, often said we shall never know any thing of the love wherewith Christ hath loved us, either in time or eternity, but by its *fruits and effects*...The love of Christ surpasseth the whole of His sufferings, as much as they surpass all our guilt and sin. His love was the cause, and His sufferings the effect of it." As the cause excels the effect, as the tree is greater than its fruit, so the fountain of Christ's love exceeds all the streams which flow from it unto us.

"Angels and saints before the throne never can enter fully into the love of Christ towards His Church and people. The subject is infinite, and their minds are finite. As finite cannot comprehend that which is infinite, so the saints can never, to the ages of eternity, fully understand the fulness of Christ's love. Why, then, is this request made? I reply, Because this is the very nature of true grace, to be reaching out after that knowledge of God in Christ which can never be fully attained—no, not in heaven. Paul prays for what those saints have not attained. Yet he prays for what might, even in this life, *be* attained—that is, in a greater measure and degree. We see from hence that both in prayer and preaching, it must be so—it ought to be so—that some subjects must be prayed for, and preached to, which are beyond our present attainments, (and it may be, will exceed our knowledge) and enjoyment in this life. Indeed, it is in this way that much of our spirituality is discovered. Hereby our real aspirations heavenward are made manifest—to have higher views of the love of Christ than we have ever yet had. Here a little and there a little, He lets down some bright beams of light from His glorious person on our minds, so that in His light, we see light" (S. Pierce).

From all that has been said, it should be evident it is a matter of the deepest importance that the saint should appropriate this petition to himself, that he should make it his paramount concern to be more and more absorbed with the love of Christ, exercising his mind thereon, feeding his soul therefrom, delighting his heart therein. That he should attentively consider the revelation given of it in the Word of Truth, meditating upon its ineffable characteristics, contemplating its wondrous manifestations, and realising that Christ's love to His own is eternal, infinite, and unalterable—not only without cessation, but without the least diminution. Such a subject is worthy of our best attention and constant pursuit. It will amply repay our best efforts and greatly enrich our spiritual lives. Nothing will so much excite gratitude in our hearts as a contemplation of the love of Christ to such unlovely creatures as we are.

Nothing will prompt so effectually unto a life of self-denial. Nothing will make so pleasant and easy a walk of obedience to Him. Nothing will so deaden us unto the world. Nothing else can so fill us with peace—yes, and with joy—in a season of affliction or bereavement. Nothing can bring such radiance to a death-bed.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). This is the closing and climacteric request. It is one which has met with ridicule from sceptical and cold critics—for regarding its language in a carnal manner, they suppose it teaches the absurdity of the finite compassing the Infinite, or of man being Deified. They imagine the apostle’s enthusiasm ran away with him, that in his devotional ecstasy, he forgot the limits that separate the creature from the Creator. But of those who would, by grace, promptly reject such horrible impieties, some are probably inclined to ask, How is it possible for such creatures as we are, compassed with infirmity, harassed and handicapped by indwelling sin, to expect such a favoured and exalted experience to ever be realised by us in this life? Rather does it appear to us that such a doubting and doleful question like that ought to be met with the retort, How was it possible that such a prayer should ever have issued from inspired lips, unless the blessings requested *are* attainable? Surely, no real Christian is prepared to affirm that the beloved apostle was wasting his breath in so supplicating God.

Instead of questioning, or at least being staggered by this petition, we ought to be rebuked and humbled for being surprised at Paul’s asking that saints might be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). Such a petition should shame us for the paucity and pettiness of our requests, indicative as they are of comparative contentedness with a sadly low level of spirituality—failing to act according to our privileges, as those who are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Instead of counting upon the divine munificence, instead of availing ourselves of the fulness which there is in Him, we limit the Holy One and treat Him almost as though He were as poor as ourselves. Alas, how often our expectations are measured by our meagre attainments, instead of our expectations being formed by the revealed character of the One who is “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10). View this petition, then, as the spiritual corrective to our faithless doubtings and groveling hopes. View it as intimating what the Christian—every Christian—may legitimately aspire unto and for which he ought daily to supplicate. View it as a revelation of the Father’s heart, making known to His children the high privilege and favoured portion which it is His will for them to enjoy. Yet remember that this is not the first, but the final petition!

In a previous article, we sought to show how that our being “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17) was both a consequence of Christ’s dwelling in our hearts by faith and also the necessary condition of our being able to comprehend and know His surpassing love. It is equally true that having our hearts and minds constantly occupied with the love of Christ is an essential preparation for our becoming “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19)—for it is by the increasing apprehension and experience of the former that we are fitted for, and led on to, the latter. The more we revel in the wondrous love of God in Christ, the more our minds are exercised upon the same; and the more largely we drink of that divine nectar, the more are our capacities enlarged, and the greater and higher become our expectations for the reception of other blessings. It is then that we, too, begin reasoning with the apostle: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not *with him* also freely give us *all things*?” (Rom 8:32)! As we become more and more occupied with the love of God in Christ, both our desires and our expectations are raised, so that we look to God and count upon His giving us all things necessary for our holiness, happiness, and satisfaction.

Is there not a perceivable and glorious fitness in God’s imparting His fulness to us through our knowledge of the love of Christ? In the first place, it is in, by, and through Christ—and particularly in His dying love—that the fulness of the divine character is *displayed*. Not a little is seen of Him in His other works, but only in Christ are His perfections fully revealed. “No man hath seen God [adequately and clearly: compare Matthew 5:8] at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath *declared him*” (Joh 1:18). Some of God’s attributes were exhibited in creation and in Providence, but it is in the work of redemption—and in that alone—that His full excellency appears. Great as were some of the displays of His glory under former dispensations—as at the Flood and His appearing at Sinai, they contained only a partial manifestation of Him. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:1)—whose communications were at most but occasional and fragmentary; “hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb 1:2)—Christ is the perfect, final, climacteric revelation of God. Said He, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Joh 14:9).

In the second place, it is through the dying love of Christ that a way has been opened for the *communication* of divine blessing unto guilty creatures. The fulness of God, especially His philanthropy and munificence, may be likened unto a mighty stream; and sin, unto an extensive and high mountain which stands in the way of its progress, and so prevents our being filled by it. Had He so pleased, God could have—by the simple fiat of His invincible will—removed that mountain, but where then had been a display of His justice and holiness? Nor could man, by his

own efforts; no, not the combined efforts of the entire human race obliterate that “abominable thing,” which kept him at a guilty distance from God and cut him off from His favour. God deemed it most for His glory, best suited to His moral perfections, to ordain that the mediatorial work of His incarnate Son should take away the sins of His people, and open a way through which His infinite blessings should flow forth to them. Accordingly, it was by the sacrifice of Christ that the mountain of our sins was removed and cast into the depths of the sea. Then the way was all clear for the fulness of God’s heart to believing sinners to flow forth unto them, without the least dishonour attaching to His character as having connived at sin. It is through Christ that the bounties of God come to His people.

In the third place, it is as knowing the love of Christ that we *imbibe*—drink of—become recipients of the divine fulness. To be filled with the fulness of God, it is not only necessary that that fulness be exhibited to us—and a way opened for its being consistently (or morally) communicated to us—but also that the soul be emptied of those impediments which obstruct its entrance. As Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) expressed it, “The way to be filled with God’s fulness is to bring no money in our sacks’ mouth.” The unrenewed mind is incapable of being filled with the fulness of God: There is no room in it for the same, for it is already pre-occupied with other things—all *its* thoughts, desires, and affections are centered upon the trash of this world. Even though it assume a religious pose, it is still so bloated with self-sufficiency and self-righteousness that there is no place for a *free* salvation, for divine *grace*. But where the love of Christ is personally and experimentally known, as it is revealed in the Gospel and realised in the soul by the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit, then all other things are counted loss, and the fulness of God finds ready access. Occupation of the heart with Christ and His love both capacitates and causes us to imbibe the divine fulness. So much then for the connection of the fourth to the third petition.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). What a petition is this! It is cumulative in its force: That ye might be filled; filled with God; filled with the fullness of God; filled with all the fulness of God. Who can comprehend all it contains? What human pen is capable of “opening” its significance? As one writer said in his very brief comments on the prayer as a whole, “In attempting to explain such portions of Scripture, it is almost impossible to avoid comparative flatness and insipidity; an inspired writer alone could do justice to them.” Such is exactly how we feel: We can but do our poor best according to our limited measure and the light which God has granted us. It should be obvious to any anointed eye that such language cannot signify (as philosophically understood) that the finite shall ever contain the Infinite, or that we should cease to be human creatures and become as God Himself. No, that can never be. It is the Christian’s being filled with all the fulness of God, according to his measure as a new creature in Christ, and in such a proportion as he is capable of in this life. Not that he is ever to be satisfied with any present measure of attainment in divine things, but constantly seeking after and reaching forth unto an enlarged degree of the same. Only those who “hunger and thirst” are assured of being “filled” (Mat 5:6).

This expression, “the fulness of God” is capable of being grammatically construed in two ways, according as we regard “God” as the genitive of the subject (i.e. the “fulness” of which God Himself *is full*); or the genitive of the object, namely, the fulness which flows from Him, or that plenitude which He *communicates* in His gifts to us. The commentators differ as to which is to be preferred; personally, we take *both*, declining to place any limitation on the expression, and shall treat of it accordingly. It may also be pointed out that the Greek word, “filled *with* all the fulness of God” is rendered in the Revised Version, “filled *unto* all the fulness of God,” which suggests the idea of a continuous process, a progressive and enlarging experience—for the ultimate aim of all genuine spiritual desire is to know God so intimately, so as to be filled to satiety by Him. This, too, we include in our understanding of the expression. Thus, a vessel may be filled up to its very brim; but suppose the size of that vessel should be *enlarged*, and continue to be enlarged, then its capacity to receive is ever increasing! Such is indeed the case—and ever will be throughout the unending ages of eternity—with the heart of the regenerate: The more the soul finds its satisfaction in God Himself, the larger its desires become, and the more we take in of Him.

How may of our difficulties are self-created! How the exercise of our *natural* minds upon such a statement as, “filled with all the fulness of God” serves to prevent us from grasping anything of its true import. We need to be much on our guard, lest our mental approach to those words, “filled” and “fulness” be not altogether too gross and carnal—not that we are to evacuate them of all meaning, but rather that we should endeavour to contemplate them spiritually and not materially. Do we not occasion ourselves unnecessary perplexity when we ask, How can the finite contain the Infinite? Are we to think of God, principally and chiefly, as the eternal, infinite, and immutable One? Surely not, for those are His incommunicable attributes, which bear no relation to us, and which qualities we, at best, know next to nothing about. But there are other excellencies of His nature and being which come closer to us; yea, which are communicated to His people. The *final* words concerning Him are: “God is light” and “God is love” (1Jo 1:5; 4:8, 16); and surely, *they* are what we should be most occupied with, and which best enable us to comprehend Him. Cannot the light, which is in God, pour itself into my darkness? Cannot His love be shed abroad in my heart? Filled with all the fulness of God as “Light” and as “Love”!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

10. The Spies (2:1-3)

In the second half of chapter 1, the Holy Spirit has recorded the response made by Joshua unto the great commission he had received from the Lord: He complied promptly, he conducted himself according to the divine Rule, and he acted in faith. The command he issued to his officers (Jos 1:11) showed he had no doubt whatever that the Jordan would be crossed, and his words to the two and a half tribes (Jos 1:15) evinced his full confidence in the Lord's help for the whole campaign. Such language had been both honouring to God and encouraging to His people. We have already seen how the Lord rewarded His servant by constraining the two and a half tribes to accept Joshua as their leader and yield full obedience unto his authority. Those things are recorded for *our* instruction and encouragement—to show that none are ever the losers by trusting in the Lord and rendering obedience to His Word. In what is now to engage our attention, we have a further proof of the Lord showing Himself strong on behalf of the dutiful.

The land which Joshua was called upon to conquer was occupied by a fierce, powerful, and ungodly people. Humanly speaking, there was no reason to conclude that the Canaanites would render assistance or do ought to make his task easier; rather to the contrary, as the attitude and actions of the kings had shown (Num 21:1, 23, 33). When he sent forth the two spies to obtain information about Jericho, he could not naturally expect that any of its inhabitants would render them any help in their difficult task. Yet that is exactly what happened, for those spies received remarkable favour in the eyes of her in whose house they obtained lodgment. Not only was she kindly disposed toward them, but she even hazarded her own life on their behalf. What an illustration was this that “when a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7)! Those two men were in the path of duty, carrying out the orders of God's servant, and He undertook for them.

“And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there” (Jos 2:1). For some time past, the children of Israel had been encamped in the plains of Moab [Shittim], which bordered on the Jordan and lay opposite Jericho (Num 33:49). And now Joshua sent forth these two spies to obtain information about this enemy stronghold, which lay in their path of advance. In so doing, Joshua has been severely criticized by some who regarded him as here acting according to a carnal policy that was dictated by unbelief. They argue that he should have trusted the Lord wholly, and that had he done so, he would have relied upon Him alone, instead of resorting to this device. We do not agree with these fault-finders, for we consider their criticism is entirely unwarranted, arises from their own confusion of mind, and is a most mischievous one.

In the first place, Joshua had a good precedent for acting as he did, for Moses had sent forth spies to view Canaan on a former occasion (Num 13); and Joshua had been divinely ordered to regulate his conduct by “this book of the law...to do according to all that is written therein” (Jos 1:7-8)—and *that* was one of the things recorded therein! But there are those who say that the suggestion to send forth those first spies proceeded from the unbelief of those who proffered it, and that Moses failed to detect their evil motives. That is indeed the view taken by most writers on the subject; but there is nothing whatever in the Word to support it. Moses declared, “the saying pleased me well” (Deu 1:23); and he made no apology later for his action. The exercise of unbelief appeared in *the sequel*; it was the gloomy report of ten of the spies which expressed unbelief, and the ready credence of that report by the faithless congregation.

Not only is Scripture silent upon any unbelief prompting the sending forth of those twelve spies, but Numbers 13:1-2 expressly informs us, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan”! Nor is there the slightest indication that that was a concession on the Lord's part, or His giving up the people unto their hearts' lusts. Joshua, then, had a good precedent, and a written example to guide him in the sending forth of the two spies. Yet, even had there been neither, so far from his action being reprehensible, it was the exercise of wise prudence and the use of legitimate means. It was his duty to “look before he leaped”—to ascertain the lay-out of Jericho, to discover if there was a weak spot in its defenses, to learn the best point at which to attack and make his plans accordingly. In so doing, he was but discharging his responsibility.

There is much misunderstanding today about the scope of those words, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Pro 3:5), and only too often, fanaticism is confounded with faith. It needs to be clearly insisted upon that the exercise of faith does not preclude the use of all legitimate means, though

we are not to rest in the means alone, but rather count upon God's blessing the same. To decline the locking of my doors and the fastening of my windows when there is an epidemic of burglary in the neighbourhood, or to retire for the night and leave a roaring fire in the grate—under the pretext of counting upon God's protecting my property—is not trusting, but *tempting* Him: Should any disagree with that statement, let him carefully ponder Matthew 4:6-7! Faith in God does not preclude the discharge of my performance of duty, both in taking precautions against danger, or using proper means for success.

Joshua was no more actuated by unbelief in sending forth those spies than Oliver Cromwell (1599-1659), as when he bade his men, "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry!" Faith does not release us from our natural obligations. As yet, Joshua knew not that the Lord had purposed that Jericho would fall without Israel having to fight for it. It was some time later when He revealed to His servant that this stronghold of the Canaanites would be overthrown without Israel's army making any direct assault upon it. The secret will of God was in nowise the Rule for Joshua to order his actions by. He was to do according to all that was "written" in the Scriptures; and thus, it is for us: Our responsibility is measured by the Word—not by God's decrees, nor the inward promptings of His Spirit. As Israel's leader, it was Joshua's duty to learn all he could about Jericho and its surroundings before he advanced upon it—Luke 14:31 illustrates the principle for which we are here contending.

"And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went" (Jos 2:1). In view of his own earlier experience (Num 13), there is good reason to believe that Joshua made a careful selection on this occasion and chose men of faith, courage, and prudence. We are, therefore, justified in concluding that ere those spies set out on their dangerous venture, they first sought unto the Lord, committed themselves and their cause into His hands, and asked Him to graciously give them success in the same. If such were the case—and it would be uncharitable to suppose otherwise—then they received fulfilment of that promise, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa 65:24). Ere those two men set out on their mission, the Lord had gone before them, preparing their way, by raising up a brave and staunch friend in the person of her in whose house they took refuge. How often has the writer—and probably the reader too—met with just such a blessed experience!

"And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there" (Jos 2:1). They were divinely directed to that particular house, though it is not likely they were personally conscious of the fact at the first. God's providence acts silently and secretly, by working in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13). Those spies acted quite freely, by their own volition, yet their steps were "ordered by the LORD" (Psa 37:23). The house in which they sheltered was owned by a harlot, named Rahab—not that she was still plying her evil trade, but that formerly, she had been a woman of ill fame, the stigma of which still clung to her. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, "Simon the leper (Mat 26:6) though cleansed from his leprosy, wore the reproach of it in his name as long as he lived: so 'Rahab the harlot,' and she is so called in the New Testament, where both her faith and her good works are praised."

"And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country" (Jos 2:2). Since it must have been known unto all in Jericho that the hosts of Israel had been encamped for some months on the opposite side of the Jordan, a keen watch had doubtless been kept on all their movements, and the entry of the two spies had therefore been observed. Even when we have committed ourselves and our cause unto God, and are in the path of duty, we have no right to expect that we shall be exempted from trials, and that all will be smooth sailing. So long as Christians are left in a world which lieth in the Wicked one (1Jo 5:19)—and is therefore hostile unto true godliness—they may look for opposition. Why so? Why does God permit such? That their graces may be tested and developed, evidencing whether they be real or fancied; and if the former, bringing forth fruit to the glory of their Author.

Had He so pleased, the Lord could have prevented the discovery of those spies in Jericho. Had He not done so in the case of the twelve men sent forth by Moses? From Numbers 13, it appears that they made an extensive survey of Canaan, and returned to report unto Israel without their enemies being aware of what had occurred. But God does not act uniformly, varying His methods as seems best in His sight. That not only exemplifies His own sovereignty, but keeps us in more complete dependence upon Him, not knowing whether His interposition on our behalf will come in one way or in another, from this direction or from that. No, even though those two men were under His immediate guidance and protection, He permitted their entry into Jericho to become known. Nor were they the losers by that; instead, they were granted a manifestation of God's power to deliver them from a horrible death.

In more than one respect is it true that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luk 16:8): A case in point is here before us. Does not the wise precaution taken by these Canaanites put most of us to shame! Are not the wicked much keener in looking after their interests than the righteous are? Are not

unbelievers much more on the alert against what would be disastrous to their prospects than the saints are? The Christian ought ever to be on his guard, watching for the approach of any enemy. But is he? Alas, no; and that is why Satan so often succeeds in gaining an advantage over him. It was while men slept that Satan sowed his tares (Mat 13:25); and it is when we become slack and careless that the devil trips us up. We must “watch” as well as “pray” if we would “enter not into temptation” (Mat 26:41). Let those who have access to John Bunyan’s (1628-1688) works read his *Holy War*.²

There is yet another line of truth which is illustrated here, and which we do well to heed. A careful and constant watch—by “night” as well as by day!—had evidently been set; yet notwithstanding the same, the two spies succeeded in obtaining an entrance into Jericho! “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psa 127:1) was strikingly exemplified on this occasion. And what is the spiritual application of that unto *us*?—this should ever be what exercises our hearts as we read and ponder God’s Word. Is not the answer found in the verse just quoted above: Since watchfulness—as well as prayer—be necessary if we are to avoid temptation, equally indispensable is prayerfulness, as well as watchfulness. No matter how alert and vigilant *we* be, unless *God’s* assistance be humbly, earnestly, and trustfully sought, all our efforts will be in vain. “Commit thy way unto the LORD; *trust also* in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psa 37:5).

Viewing this detail from a higher standpoint, may we not also see here a demonstration of that truth. “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, *that* shall stand” (Pro 19:21). It was so here: The king of Jericho proposed, but God disposed. He determined to prevent any Israelite from entering his city, but his well-laid plans came to naught. When the Lord sets before us an open door, “no man can shut it” (Rev 3:8), and *He* set before those two spies an open door into Jericho; and it was utterly futile for any man to endeavour to keep them out. Equally true is it that when the Lord “shutteth,...no man openeth” (Rev 3:7), yet God Himself can do so; therefore, it is the privilege and duty of His servant never to accept defeat, but seek the prayers of God’s people that He “would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Col 4:3).

“*And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country*” (Jos 2:3). If the reader has not already formed the habit of so doing, let him now begin to read such a passage as the one we are considering with the specific object of trying to find something in each verse of practical importance to *himself*—not that which is “deep” and intricate, but what lies on the surface and is obvious to a *thoughtful* reader. Here we may learn an important and needful “lesson” from the action of the king of Jericho. When he was informed that Israel’s spies were now in the city, he did not treat the report with either contemptuous scorn or careless unconcern, but believed the same and acted promptly upon it. Well for us if we heed a timely warning, and seek to nip a danger while it is still in the bud. If we do not heed the first alarms of conscience, but instead trifle with temptation, a fall is sure to follow; and the allowance of one sin leads to the formation of an evil habit.

Changing our angle of meditation, let us contemplate the effect upon the two spies of the demand made upon Rahab by the king’s officers. If she complied with their peremptory order and delivered her guests into their hands, then—humanly speaking—they could hope for no other treatment than what has always been meted out unto captured spies. Imagine the state of their minds as they listened intently—which doubtless they did—to that ominous command. Remember they were men of like passions unto ourselves; would they not, then, be filled with perturbation and consternation? Up to this point, things had gone smoothly for them, but now all seemed lost. Would they not ask themselves, Did we do the right thing after all in taking shelter in this house? Ah, have we not, too, passed through some similar experience? We entered upon what we believed was a certain course of duty, committed the same unto God, and sought His blessing. At first, all went well, His smile appeared to be upon us, and then a crises occurred which seemed to spell sure defeat. Faith must be tested, patience have her perfect work.

² *Holy War* – the Christian allegorical masterpiece telling of the wicked prince Diabolis leading a rebellion in the city of Man-soul, only to be conquered by Emmanuel in retaking the city, showing grace to its faithful inhabitants and judgment to its many rebels, and rededicating it to the rightful Great King. Available for worldwide download from the www.mountzion.org website.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

12b. Its Evidences

4. Consider your *occupation with Christ* and remember that growth in grace is commensurate with your growing in the knowledge of Him (2Pe 3:18). That knowledge is indeed a spiritual one, yet it is received via the understanding, for what is not apprehended by the mind cannot profit the heart. Nothing but an increasing familiarity and closer fellowship with Christ can nourish the soul and promote spiritual prosperity. There can be no real progress without a better acquaintance with His person, office, and work. Christianity is more than a creed, more than a system of ethics, more than a devotional programme. It is a *life*: a life of faith on Christ, of communion with Him, and conformity to Him (Phi 1:21). Take Christ out of Christianity and there is nothing left. There must be constant renewed acts of faith on Christ, yet our faith is always in proportion to the spiritual knowledge we have of its object. “That I may know him” precedes “and the power of his resurrection” (Phi 3:10). Christ revealed to the heart is the Object of our knowledge (2Co 4:6), and our spiritual knowledge of Him consists in the concepts and apprehensions of Him which are formed in our minds. That knowledge is fed, strengthened, and renewed by our spiritual and believing meditations on Christ, and those being made effectual in the soul by the power of the Spirit.

The Object of our faith is a known Christ, and the better we know Him, the more we shall act faith on Him. The Christian life consists, essentially, in living on Christ: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal 2:20). The particular acts of this life of faith are beholding Christ (as He is presented in the Word), cleaving to Him, making use of Him, drawing from Him, holding free communion with Him, delighting ourselves in Him. Alas, the great majority of Christians seek to live on *themselves* and feed on their experience. Some are forever occupied with their corruptions and failures, while others are wholly taken up with their graces and attainments. But there is nothing of *Christ* in either the one or the other, and nothing of faith; rather does self absorb them and a life of sense predominates. All genuine “experience” is knowing ourselves to be what God has described us in His Word, and having such an inward realization thereof as proves to us our dire need of Christ. It consists, too, of such a knowledge of Him as that He is exactly suited to our case and divinely qualified and perfectly fitted for our every lack. No matter how “deep” may be your “experience,” it is worth nothing, unless it turns you to the great Physician.

How often have we read in the diaries and biographies of saints, or heard them say, “O what blessed enlargement of soul I was favoured with, what liberty in prayer, how my heart was melted before the Lord, what joy unspeakable possessed me.” But if those “mountain-top experiences” be analyzed, what do they consist of? What is there of *Christ* in them? It is not spiritual views of Him which engages their attention, but the warmth of *their* affections, a being carried away with their comforts. No wonder such ecstasies are so brief and are followed by deep depression of spirits. Measure your spiritual growth rather by the extent you are learning to look away from both sinful self and religious self. Christian progress is to be gauged not by feelings, but by the extent to which you live outside of yourself and live upon Christ—making fuller use of Him, prizing Him more highly, finding all your springs in Him, making Him your “all” (Col 3:11). It is a consciousness of sin and not of our graces, the burden of our corruptions and not delighting ourselves in our enlargements, which will move us to look away from self and behold the Lamb.

5. Consider the *path of obedience* and what progress you are making therein. That which distinguishes the regenerate in a practical way from the unregenerate is that the former are “obedient children” (1Pe 1:14), whereas the latter are entirely dominated by the carnal mind, which is “enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). The very first criterion given in the epistle which is written in order that believers may know they have eternal life is, “Hereby we do know [are divinely assured] that we know him [savingly], if we keep his commandments” (1Jo 2:3). Conversion is a forsaking of the path of self-will and self-pleasing (Isa 53:6) and a complete surrender of myself to the Lordship of Christ, and the genuineness thereof is evidenced by my taking His yoke upon me and submitting to His authority. If we truly submit to His authority, then we shall seek to comply with all He enjoins and not pick and choose between His precepts. Nothing less than whole-hearted and impartial obedience is required from us (Joh 15:14). If we do not sincerely endeavour to obey in *all* things, then we do not in *any*, but merely select what is agreeable to ourselves. Then is there any such thing as *progress in obedience*? Yes.

We are improving in obedience when it becomes *more extensive*. Though the young convert has fully surrendered himself to the Lord, yet he devotes himself to some duties with more earnestness and diligence than he does to others; but as he becomes better acquainted with God's will, more of his ways are regulated thereby. As spiritual light increases, he discovers that God's commandment is "exceeding broad" (Psa 119:96), forbidding not only the overt act, but all that leads to it, and inculcating (by necessary implication) the opposite grace and virtue. Growth in grace appears when my obedience is *more spiritual*. One learning to write becomes more painstaking, so that he forms his letters with greater accuracy; so as one progresses in the school of Christ, he pays more attention to that word, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts *diligently*" (Psa 119:4). So, too, superior aims and motives prompt him: His springs are less servile and more evangelical, his obedience proceeding from love and gratitude. That, in turn, produces another evidence of growth: Obedience becomes easier and pleasanter, so that his "delight is in the law of the LORD" (Psa 1:2). Duty is now a joy: "O how love I thy law!" (Psa 119:97).

6. Consider the *privilege of prayer* and how far you are improving in that exercise. Probably not a few will exclaim, "Alas, in this respect, I have deteriorated, for I am neither as diligent in it, nor as fervent as I used to be." But it is easy to form a wrong judgment upon the matter, measuring it by quantity instead of quality. Devout Jews and Papists spend much time on their knees, but that is simply the religion of the flesh. There is often more of the natural than the spiritual in the devotional exercises of the young convert, especially if he be of a warm and ardent temperament. It is easy for enthusiasm to carry him away when new objects and interests engage him, and for emotionalism to be mistaken for fervour of spirit. Personally, we very much doubt if the Lord's people experience any true progress in their prayer life, until they make the humbling discovery they know not how to *pray*, though they may have attained to considerable proficiency in framing eloquent and moving petitions as men judge. "We [Christians!] *know not* what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26): Did we realise that in our spiritual childhood? The first mark of growth here is when we are moved to cry, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luk 11:1).

As the Christian grows in grace, prayer becomes more of an attitude than an act, an act of dependence upon and confidence in God. It becomes an instinct to turn to Him for help, guidance, wisdom, and strength. It consists of an increasing looking to and leaning upon Him, acknowledging Him in all our ways. Thus, prayer becomes more mental than vocal, more ejaculatory than studied, more frequent than prolonged. As the Christian progresses, his prayers will be more spiritual: He will be more intent upon the pursuit of holiness than of knowledge, he will be more concerned about pleasing God than ascertaining whether his name be written in the Book of Life, more earnest in seeking those things which will promote the divine glory than minister to his comfort. As he learns to know God better, his confidence in Him will be deepened, so that if on the one hand, he knows nothing is too hard for Him; on the other, he is assured that His wisdom will withhold, as well as bestow. Again, growth appears when we are as diligent in praying for the whole Household of Faith, as for yourself or immediate family. Our heart has been enlarged when we make "supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18).

7. Consider the *Christian warfare* and what success you are having therein. Here again, we shall certainly err and draw a wrong conclusion, unless we pay close attention to the language of Holy Writ. That which we are called to engage in is "the good fight of *faith*" (1Ti 6:12), but if we seek to gauge our progress therein by the testimony of our *senses*, a false verdict will inevitably be given. The faith of God's elect has the Scriptures for its sole ground and Christ as its immediate Object. Nowhere in Scripture has Christ promised His redeemed such a victory over their corruptions in this life that they shall be slain, nor even that they will be so subdued their lusts will cease vigorously opposing; no, not for a season, for there is no discharge nor furlough in this warfare. Nay, He may permit your enemies to gain such a temporary advantage that you cry "iniquities prevail against me" (Psa 65:3); nevertheless, you are to *continue resisting*, assured by the Word of promise, you shall yet be an overcomer. Satan's grand aim is to drive you to *despair*, because of the prevelancy of your corruptions; but Christ has prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and proof His prayer is being answered is that you weep over your failures and do not become a total apostate.

8. The trouble is that we want to mix something with faith—our feelings, our "experiences," or the fruits of faith. Faith is to look to Christ and triumph in Him alone. It is to be engaged with Him and His Word at all times, no matter what we encounter. If we endeavour to ascertain the outcome of this fight by the evidence of our senses—what we see and feel within—instead of judging it by faith, then our present experience will be that of Peter's "when he saw the wind boisterous" (Mat 14:30) while walking on the sea toward Christ; or we will conclude, "I shall now perish" (1Sa 27:1). Did not Paul find that when he would do good, evil was present within him; yea, that while he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, he *saw* another law in his members warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity, so that he cried, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24). *That* was his "experience," and the evidence of sense. Ah, but he did not, as so many do, stop there: "Who shall deliver me...? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:24-25), he answered. *That* was the language of *faith*! Is

it yours? Your success in this fight is to be determined by whether—despite all failures—you are continuing therein and whether you confidently look forward to the final issue—that you *will* triumph through Christ.

If we received a letter from a native of Greenland's icy mountains asking us to give him as accurate and vivid a word picture as possible of an English apple-tree and its fruit, we would not single out for our description one that had been artificially raised in a hothouse, nor would we select one which grew in poor and rocky ground on some desolate hill-side; rather would we take on that was to be found in average soil in a typical orchard. It is quite true the others would be apple trees and might bear fruit, yet if we confined our word picture unto the portraying of either of them, the Greenlander would not obtain a fair concept of the ordinary apple tree. It is equally unfair and misleading to take the peculiar experiences of any particular Christian and hold them up as the standard by which all others should measure themselves. There are many kinds of apples, differing in size, colour, and flavour. And though Christians have certain fundamental things in common, yet, no two of them are alike in all respects. Variety marks all the works of God. Above, we have referred to seven different phases of the Christian life by which we may test our progress. In what follows, we mention some of the characteristics which pertain more or less—for in germ form, they are found in all—to a state of Christian *maturity*.

Prudence. There is a well-known adage—though often ignored by adults—that “we cannot put old heads on young shoulders.” That is true spiritually, as well as naturally. We live and learn, though some learn more readily than others—usually it is because they receive *their* instruction from the Scriptures, while others are informed only by painful experience. The Word says, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psa 146:3); and if we heed that injunction, we are spared many a bitter disappointment; whereas, if we take people at their word and count on their help, we shall frequently find that we leaned upon a broken reed. In many other ways, the young convert's zeal becomes tempered by knowledge, and he conducts himself more prudently. As he becomes more experienced, he learns to act with greater caution and circumspection, and to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” (Col 4:5), as he also discovers the chilling effects which frothy professors have upon him, so that he is more particular in selecting his associates. He learns, too, his own peculiar weaknesses, and in which direction he needs most to watch and pray against temptations.

Sobriety. This can be attained unto only in the school of Christ. It is true that in certain dispositions, there is much less to oppose this virtue; yet its full development can only be under the operations of divine grace, as Titus 2:11-12 plainly shows. We would define Christian sobriety as the regulation of our appetites and affections in their pursuit and use of all things—we can be righteous “over much” (Ecc 7:16). It is the governing of our inward and outward man by the rules of moderation and temperance. It is the keeping of our desires within due bounds, so that we are preserved from excesses in practice. It is a frame or temper of the mind which is the opposite of excitedness. It is a being “temperate in *all things*” (1Co 9:25)—and that includes our opinions, as well as conduct. It is a holy seriousness, calmness, gravity, and balance, which prevents one becoming an extremist. It is that self-control which keeps us from being unduly cast down by sorrows, or elated by joys. It causes us to hold the things of this life with a light hand, so that neither the pleasures, nor the cares of the world unduly affect the heart.

Stability. There is a spiritual childishness, as well as a natural one, wherein the young convert acts more from impulse than principle, is carried away by his fancies, and easily influenced by those around him. To be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14) is one of the characteristics of spiritual immaturity; and when we waver in faith and are of a doubtful mind, then we halt and falter in our duties. Even that love which is shed abroad in the hearts of the renewed needs to be controlled and guided, as appears from that petition of the apostle's, “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9). As the Christian grows in grace, he becomes “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (Col 2:7). As he grows in the knowledge of the Lord, it can be said of him, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD” (Psa 112:7). He may be shaken, but will not be shattered by bad news, for having learned to rely upon God, he knows no change of circumstances can do more than lightly affect him. No matter what may befall him, he will remain calm, confident in his Refuge: Since his heart be anchored in God, his comforts do not ebb and flow with the creature.

Patience. Here we must distinguish between that natural placidity which marks some temperaments, and that spiritual grace which is wrought in the Christian by God. We must also remember that spiritual patience has both a passive and an active side to it. Passively, it is quiet and contented resignation under suffering (Luk 21:19), being the opposite of acting “as a wild bull in a net” (Isa 51:20). Its language is “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). Actively, it is persevering in duty (Heb 12:1)—being the opposite of turning back “in the day of battle” (Psa 78:9). Its language is “be not weary in well doing” (2Th 3:13). Patience enables the believer to meekly bear whatever the Lord is pleased to lay upon him. It causes the believer to quietly await God's

hour of relief or deliverance. It prompts the believer to continue performing his duty, in spite of all opposition and discouragement. Now, since it is tribulation (Rom 5:3) and the trying of our faith (Jam 1:3) which “worketh patience,” much of it is not to be looked for in the spiritually inexperienced and immature. We are improving in patience when more spiritual considerations prompt us thereto.

Humility. Evangelical humility is a realization of my ignorance, incompetency and vileness, with an answerable frame of heart. As the young believer applies himself diligently to the reading of God’s Word and acquires more familiarity with its contents, as he becomes better instructed in the Faith, he is very apt to be puffed up with his knowledge. But as he studies the Word more deeply, he perceives how much there is therein which transcends his understanding; and as he learns to distinguish between an intellectual information of spiritual things and an experimental and transforming knowledge of them, he cries, “That which I see not teach thou me” (Job 34:32) and “teach me thy statutes” (Psa 119:12). As he grows in grace, he makes an increasing discovery of his ignorance and realises, “he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1Co 8:2). As the Spirit enlarges his desires, he thirsts more and more for holiness; and the more he is conformed to the image of Christ, the more will he groan because of his sensible unlikeness to Him. The young Christian attempts to perform many duties in his own strength, but later on discovers that apart from Christ, he can do nothing (Joh 15:5). The father in Christ is self-emptying and self-abased and marvels increasingly at the longsufferance of God toward him.

Forbearance. A spirit of bigotry, partisanship, and intolerance is a mark of narrow-mindedness and of spiritual immaturity. On first entering the school of Christ, most of us expected to find little difference between members of the same Family; but more extensive acquaintance with them taught us better—for we found their minds varied as much as their countenances, their temperaments more than their local accents of speech, and that amid general agreement, there were wide divergences of opinions and sentiments in many things. While all God’s people are taught of Him, yet they know but “in part”—and the “part” one knows may not be the part which another knows. All the saints are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet He does not operate uniformly in them, nor bestow identical gifts (1Co 12:8-11). Thus, opportunity is afforded us to forbear “one another in love” (Eph 4:2) and not make a man an offender for a word, or despise those who differ from me. Growth in grace is evidenced by a spirit of clemency and toleration, granting to others the same right of private judgment and liberty as I claim for myself. The mature Christian, generally, will subscribe to that axiom, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

Contentment. As a spiritual virtue, this is to have our desires limited by a present enjoyment, or to find a sufficiency in and be satisfied with my immediate portion. It is the opposite of murmurings, distracted cares, and covetous desires. To murmur is to quarrel with the dispensations of providence; to have distracted cares is to distrust God for the future; to have covetous desires is to be dissatisfied with what God has assigned me. God knows what is best for our good; and the more that be realised, the more thankful shall we be for the allotments of His love and wisdom—pleased with what pleases Him. Contentment is a mark of weanedness from the world and of delighting ourselves in the Lord. The apostle declared, “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phi 4:11); and as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) said, that lesson was learned “not at the feet of Gamaliel, but of Christ.” Nor was it something he acquired there all in a moment. By nature, we are restless, impatient, envious of the condition of others; but submission to the divine will and confidence in God’s goodness produces peace of mind and rest of heart. It is the mature Christian who can say, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psa 4:7).

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

10b. Its Results

4. *Brought into God’s favour.* By nature and by practice, Christians were “the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3), being under the curse of the Law—all the threatenings of God in full force against them. But condemnation, awful as it is, is not damnation—the sentence is not yet executed, and until it is, it is not irrevocable. But once the sinner savingly believes in Christ, he stands in a new relation to God as Lawgiver and Judge: He is no longer under the condemning power of the Law, but is “under grace” (Rom 6:14). As the manslayer was—on having entered the city of refuge by a special constitution of mercy—secure from the avenger of blood (Num 35:12), so

the sinner who has “fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18) in the Gospel is—by the gracious constitution of God—forever secured from the curse. All the threatenings which hitherto belonged to him, no longer stand against him, but are reckoned by the Judge of all, as having been executed on his Substitute who was made a curse for His people. But more: The *favour* of God’s divine blessing is now his status and portion.

When Christ reconciled the Church unto God, He did more than put away her sins and avert the judicial wrath of God: He re-instated her in God’s favour and opened the way for the full manifestation of His love unto her. The two things are clearly distinguished in Colossians 1:20: “Having *made peace* through the blood of his cross, by him *to reconcile* all things unto himself” As we have so often pointed out in these articles, “reconciliation” consists of two things: The removal of enmity, and the restoring of amity—the two parts of Christ’s mediatorial work, respectively, effecting them. His bloodshedding, or enduring the curse of the Law; removing the enmity, or “making peace.” His obedience to the Law, or bringing in “an everlasting righteousness”; procuring the reward, and entitling unto the divine blessing. The shedding of Christ’s atoning blood obtained for His people the remission or pardon of their sins: His meritorious obedience secured for them the justification of their persons in the high court of Heaven, or their admittance into God’s judicial favour.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom *also* we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom 5:1-2). As we pointed out in our last, “peace with God” refers not to a subjective experience, but to an objective fact; that it signifies not tranquility of soul, but a relation to the Lawgiver. Hostilities between the divine Judge and His believing people have ceased: His sword of justice is sheathed, and therefore, they no longer have cause to dread His vengeance. But that is more or less a negative thing: There is something else, something positive, something more blessed. That additional benefit is introduced in Romans 5:2 by the word “also.” Suppose that one of the nobles of the land, who stood high at court and enjoyed special privileges from his sovereign, should commit some great offence against the throne; in fact, turn traitor. We can imagine that, in his clemency, the king might pardon the offender upon the acknowledgement of his crime and his suing for mercy, but we can scarcely conceive of the monarch restoring his subject to the intimacy and privileges he formerly enjoyed. Yet *that* is what Christ has done—restored apostate traitors to the full favour of God.

“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein *we stand*” (Rom 5:2). Christ has not only brought us into a legal state wherein we are secure from God’s wrath, but into one of intimate friendship and fellowship with Him. It is indeed a great mercy that God has ceased to be offended with us, that He will never inflict any penal punishment upon us; but it is a far greater and grander blessing that He should regard us with pleasure and pour blessings upon us. “By whom also we have access” implies that by nature, we did not; and that by our own efforts, we could not. Previous to conversion, our standing was in disgrace; but now, we are “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6)—or as it might more literally be rendered, “graced in the beloved.” Christ has reinstated His people in the good will and perfect acceptance of God: “This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand” (1Pe 5:12). We stand in the full favour of God, with not a single cloud between us.

By the mediatorial work of Christ, the believer has full right of approach to the divine mercy seat, to gaze upon the face of a reconciled God, to dwell in His glorious presence forevermore. For this is no transient blessing which the obedience and bloodshedding of Christ has procured for His people, but a permanent and unalienable one. It is not only that they are admitted into God’s favour, but it is “this grace wherein *we stand*” (Rom 5:2)—wherein ye are eternally settled and established. It is not only that God will never again be at judicial enmity against them, but that He is forever their Friend. The blessings which Christ has obtained for His redeemed are no contingent or evanescent ones— for they are dependent upon nothing whatever in or from *them*, but are the unforfeitable procurements of His infinitely-meritorious righteousness. And therefore, has the Father made a covenant-promise to His Son concerning those He transacted for: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer 32:40). We have been received into the most cordial good will and everlasting favour of the Father.

5. *Given access to God.* The very first message from Heaven after the advent of the Prince of peace revealed the purpose for which the Son had become incarnate and made known what He would accomplish from His mission: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:13-14). That brief word contained a broad outline of the whole subject of reconciliation. First, it declared that the glory of God was its grand design, for that ever takes precedence of all other considerations. Second, it proclaimed that the issue of it would be peace on earth—not “in the earth,” but a revolted province restored to fealty. Third, it announced—as the “and” connecting the first and second clauses shows—that God’s glory and the good of His people go hand in hand: Though He would show Himself a Friend to them, yet He would conserve His own interests and maintain His own honour.

Fourth, it published the grand outcome: “Good will toward men” (Luk 2:14)—they brought into God’s favour. The final clause may also be rendered, “good will *among* men”—Jew and Gentile made one!

Now, no sooner had the Peacemaker exemplified God’s holiness, magnified His law, and pacified His wrath—thereby glorifying Him to the superlative degree—than we are told: “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Mat 27:51). That was a parable in action, and one possessed of profound spiritual significance. There were several other remarkable phenomena which immediately followed the death of Christ, but the Holy Spirit has placed first the rending of the temple veil. He calls our attention to that miraculous happening with the word, “Behold”—bidding us pause and consider this marvel, be awed by it, amazed over it. That “veil” was a magnificent curtain hung between the holy place and the holy of holies, separating the one from the other, barring an entrance into the innermost chamber and shutting out from view its holy furniture from the sight of those in the second compartment. It was rent asunder at the moment Christ expired. Immediately, the soul and spirit were separated from Christ’s body, an invisible hand separated the veil.

Amazing synchronization was that! Christ was the true Tabernacle or Temple (Joh 1:14); and therefore, when His flesh was rent (Heb 10:20), there was an answering rending of the structure which typed forth His flesh. Well may we reverently inquire, “*What* was signified thereby?” First, though subordinately, it signified a revelation of the Old Testament mysteries. The veil of the temple was for *concealment*. Out of all the congregation of Israel, only one man was ever permitted to enter the holy of holies; and he did but once a year, and then in a cloud of incense—symbolizing the darkness of that dispensation. But now, by the death of Christ, all is laid open: The shadows give place to the substance; the mysteries are unveiled. Second, and dispensationally, the uniting of Jew and Gentile by the removal of the partition wall—the ceremonial law (Eph 2:14-15)—which had separated them. But third, and chiefly, that a new and living way had been opened unto God: The rending of the veil opened the door into the holiest, where He abode between the cherubim. The rending of the veil signified and announced free access unto God.

First, for Christ Himself. During the three hours of darkness, the Redeemer was cut off from God. But when the veil was rent, there was an anticipation of what is recorded in Hebrews 9:11-12. Though Christ did not officially enter Heaven till forty days after His resurrection, yet He acquired the right to enter immediately (as our Surety) when He cried, “It is finished” (Joh 19:30), and had a virtual admission. Therein, we may perceive the conformity between the Head and the members of His Body: The moment a sinner savingly believes in Christ, he has a title to enter heaven, yet he has to wait his appointed time, ere he does so in the fullest sense. Second, for the redeemed. Christ has procured an entrance for them in Spirit, and by faith even now: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Heb 10:19-20). We have free access to the throne of grace. “For through him [Christ] we both [believing Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).

It was sin which estranged us from the Holy One. Upon his first transgression, Adam was driven out of paradise. The whole congregation of Israel at Sinai were commanded to keep their distance. The unclean in Israel were debarred from the camp and tabernacle. By so many different emblems did the Lord signify that sin had obstructed our access to Him. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13), because His blood put away our sins. The efficacy of His sacrifice and the virtue of His meritorious obedience conferred upon His believing people the right to draw near unto God. All legal distance is removed: Reconciliation has been effected; access to God is their consequent privilege and right. What a wonder of wonders is this!—that one who is by nature a depraved creature may, by grace and through the Mediator, not only approach unto God without servile fear, but may have blessed fellowship with Him. To come into His very presence as a consciously-accepted worshipper is the distinguishing blessing of Christianity, in contrast from Judaism, Romanism, and all false religions.

6. Endowed with the *sanctifying gifts of the Spirit*. “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). The mighty work of the Spirit in us is as indispensable as the meritorious work of Christ for us in order to appear before God as acceptable worshippers. As it is by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, we have the *title* of access to God, so it is by the regenerating and sanctifying operations of the Spirit, we have personal *meetness* for the same. That was typed out of old under the Mosaic economy. Those who drew near unto Jehovah in the services of His house were required to have not only the consecrating blood applied to their persons, but to be sprinkled with the anointing oil (Lev 8:24, 30). Three things are required if we are to worship God aright: There must be knowledge in the understanding, that we may be informed of what God approves and accepts; grace in the heart, so that our communion with Him may be a real and spiritual one—and not merely a bodily and formal one;

and strength in the soul for the exercise of faith, love, reverence, and delight. By the Spirit alone are those three essentials imparted.

Now it is from a reconciled God, in virtue of Christ's meritorious work, that we receive the sanctifying Spirit. This is evident from the particular character in which the apostle addressed Deity in the following prayers: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1Th 5:23); "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight" (Heb 13:20-21). The "God of peace" is the pacified and reconciled God, and the blessings which the apostle requested are bestowed, or wrought in us by the Spirit. Christ prayed that His redeemed might be loved as He was loved of the Father (Joh 17:23-26)—not in degree, but in kind; and the sanctifying graces of the Spirit are the tokens and evidences of His love, the manifestations of His heart toward His people. Or, as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) so beautifully expressed it, they are "the jewels of the covenant, wherewith the Spouse of Christ is decked."

Even the regenerate—harassed as they are by indwelling sin and hindered by their infirmities—can no more spiritually approach unto the Father without the gracious operations of the Spirit, than they could without the mediation of Christ: The One supplies the experimental enablement, as the Other has the legal right. The Spirit's operations within us are imperative if our leaden hearts are to be raised above the things of time and sense, if our affections are to flow forth unto their rightful Object, if faith is to be duly acted upon Him, if a sense of His presence is to be felt in our souls. He alone can empower us experimentally to have real fellowship with God, so that He is glorified; and we, edified. How shall we ask for those things which are according to the divine will, unless the Spirit prompts us (Rom 8:26)? How shall we sing "with grace" in our "hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16) without the Spirit's quickenings? How shall we bring forth fruit to the glory of God without the Spirit energizing us? And our endowment with the Spirit is one of the bestowments—the chief of them—of a reconciled God.

7. *God's acceptance of our services.* Those "services" may be broadly and briefly summed up as our obedience and worship. But says the self-emptying Christian, What can a poor, sinful creature like me possibly offer unto God which would be acceptable unto Him? The proud religionist may boast of his performances and plume his fine feathers, but not so one whose eyes have been anointed by the Spirit, so that he sees himself in God's light. The one who is really "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3) realises not only that his very righteousness as a natural man are as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), but that his most spiritual works as a regenerate man are defective and defiled. How then shall *such* services be received by the Holy One? Some may experience a difficulty at this point and ask, "Since the spiritual works of a Christian are wrought by the Holy Spirit, how can *they* be defiled?" Answer: They are wrought by His agency, and yet are performed by us. The purest water is fouled when it passes through a soiled pipe. The most brilliant lamp is blurred if it shines through a smoky chimney. Thus it is, with what the Spirit produces through us.

But since our obedience and worship are so faulty and polluted, how can God *accept* them? Turn back to the first worshipper on this sin-cursed earth: "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel *and* to his offering" (Gen 4:4). It was by faith that Abel offered that "excellent sacrifice" (Heb 11:4)—which so blessedly foreshadowed the Lamb of God—and "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering": The worshipper himself was first accepted, and then his worship! Thus it has been ever since: The person is first taken into God's favour, and then his services are acknowledged as well-pleasing unto Him. Yet that does not furnish a complete answer to the question: Other types have to be taken note of, if we are to obtain a complete picture. On the forehead of Israel's high priest was a plate of pure gold bearing the inscription, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD." He wore it that he might "bear the *iniquity* of the *holy* things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD" (Exo 28:36-38). Christ bore the defects of our "holy things"; and because of His holiness, God accepts from us whatever is sincere.

"The sinful failings of our best actions are hid and covered: they are not examined by a severe Judge, but accepted by a loving Father" (T. Manton). That is true, but it fails to show *how* the Father is righteously able to act so graciously. It is not because there has been any relating of His holiness or lowering of His standard, but because our Surety made full satisfaction to God's holiness for the sinful failings of their best actions. But even that is not all, for it is largely negative: Our sincere obedience and reverent worship is accepted by the Father, because the same ascends to God, perfumed with the merits of Christ. In Revelation 8:3, He is seen as the Angel of the Covenant: "And there was given unto him much incense [emblem of His merits], that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints"! Thus it is "by *Him*" that we "offer the sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb 13:15). As those made "priests unto God" (Rev 1:6), we are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices"; and they are "acceptable to God *by Jesus Christ*" (1Pe 2:5)! And they are acceptable, because He has effected a perfect reconciliation between God and the Church.

8. *Our eternal security.* In view of all that has been brought out under the previous heads, there is little need for us to enlarge upon this one. So perfect was the sacrifice which Christ offered to God on behalf of His Church that there is a perpetuity annexed to it: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Its efficacy is of everlasting force, and its merits are imputed to the believer without cessation. Christ made an end of sins, effected reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24). That righteousness is imputed to His people and placed upon them as a robe (Isa 61:10)—and such is its virtue and vitality that it never wears out. But more: The risen Christ now serves continually as the Advocate of His people, pleading His sacrifice on their behalf, and suing out the benefits thereof. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). If while we were the objects of the divine displeasure, Christ restored us to God’s favour, much more now that we are God’s friends will He obtain pardon for our daily transgressions and secure our final salvation. The life of our risen Saviour is the security of His people: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19).

“Christ is not only the Mediator of reconciliation to *make* our peace, but the Mediator of intercession to *preserve* it. He only took away our sins by His death; He only can preserve our reconciliation by His life. As He suffered effectively by the strength of His Deity to make our peace, so He intercedes in the strength of His merit to preserve peace. He did not only take away, but ‘abolish and slew the enmity’ (Eph 2:15-16). He slew it to make it incapable of living again; and if any sin stands up to provoke justice, He sits as an Advocate to answer the process (1Jo 2:2). As God was in Christ reconciling the world, so He is in Christ giving out the fruits of that reconciliation, not imputing our trespasses unto us. Our constant access to God is by Christ. He sits in Heaven to lead us by the hand unto the Father, as a prince in favour brings a man into the presence of a gracious king” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The sum of this—and the grand and infallible conclusion to which it all leads—is that *nothing* “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).

9. *God for us*—loving, providing for, protecting, blessing us. If we have been brought into His favour, and if He be the Ruler of the universe, then what will necessarily follow? This: That He will make “*all* things work together for [our] good” (Rom 8:28). Nay more: “For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas [the Gospel ministry], or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all are yours*; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:21-23). “Christ is God’s” is a relationship based upon the Mediatorial office. To Him, as the rightful Heir, God has given “all things” (Heb 1:2); and by virtue of our relation to Christ, all things are *ours*—relatively, and subject to God’s government for our good.

10. *The beatific vision.* On the Resurrection morning, the body of the believer will be “fashioned like unto his [Christ’s] glorious body” (Phi 3:21); then in spirit, soul, and body, we shall be “like him” (1Jo 3:2), fully and eternally “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son” (Rom 8:29). Then will His prayer receive answer: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may *behold my glory*” (Joh 17:24).

JULY

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15). Here we have a distinct, though brief, description of those whom the high and lofty One inhabits. Contrition and humility are the identifying marks of the particular characters in whom the Holy One tabernacles. That description applies to and is common to *all* the regenerate. “Him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” is not a delineation of a few exceptionally eminent saints who constitute a special class all to themselves, but depicts all who are truly saved. So far from those marks belonging only to certain highly favoured souls that have far out-stripped their fellows in spiritual attainments, they are found in every one who has been born again. That is clear from Romans 8:9-11: God in-

dwells all the regenerate, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”; and compare Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:22.

Now if the reader will carefully and honestly examine himself in the mirror of the Word, he should have no difficulty in discovering whether or not those two features be stamped upon *him*. The Hebrew word for “contrite” means “bruised” or “beaten,” as an object that comes under the pestle or hammer. That at once reminds us of Jeremiah 23:29: “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”—fire in the conscience (Deu 32:22), and a hammer on the heart. When God’s Word is applied in power, it convicts the sinner of his awful sinfulness; and when a crucified Christ is revealed to him, he mourns for his sins as one mourneth for his only son (Zec 12:10). Contrition then is a feeling sense of the heinousness and loathsomeness of sin. It causes us to grieve over it with godly sorrow. If sin be hateful to you, if the plague of your heart be your sorest grief, if you mourn over your corruptions, then you *have* a “contrite” spirit.

But it is rather upon the second of those marks we wish to dwell, for many of God’s little ones deprive themselves of legitimate assurance because of ignorance on this subject. An humble spirit or heart is an infallible sign of regeneration, for the unregenerate are proud, self-complacent, self-righteous. Yet the very mention of the word “humility” seems to cut off many Christians. As they examine themselves, they discover so much pride at work within that they are quite unable to persuade themselves that *they* have an *humble* heart. It seems to them that it is one thing they most evidently lack. Now it will no doubt be a startling statement, but we unhesitatingly affirm that the great majority of God’s people are—not less—but far more humble than they suppose. That is a fact, and we propose to now furnish clear and full proof of the same, and in language which we trust the simplest will be able to grasp. Attend closely then to what follows.

First, that the Christian reader possesses an humble heart is plain from the fact that he confesses himself to be a *Hell-deserving sinner*. We do not have in mind what you think or say of yourself when in the company of your fellows, but rather what you feel and say of yourself when *alone with God*. Whatever pretences you are guilty of before men—and none of us can plead guiltless there, for we naturally want people to think well of us and are hurt if they do not—when in the presence of the Omniscient One, you are real, sincere, and genuine. Now, dear reader, be honest with yourself: When on your knees before the Throne of Grace, do you freely and frankly acknowledge that if you received your lawful due, you would—even now—be suffering the awful fires of Hell? If so, a miracle of grace must have been wrought within you. No unregenerate person will or can honestly make such a confession to God, for he does not feel he has done anything deserving of eternal punishment!

Second, if you own that all your righteousness are *as filthy rags*, that is proof you possess an humble heart. Of course, we mean much more than your merely uttering those words as a parrot might, or even singing then during some religious service. We mean that when you are in the presence of *the Lord*—which is always the surest test—you personally realise that you have nothing whatever of your own to commend you to His favourable regard, that there is not a single meritorious deed standing to your credit *before Him*. We mean that, when bowed in His presence, in the calmness and quietness of your closet, you own without any qualification that your best performances are *defiled by sin* and that in yourself, you are a filthy pauper. If that be indeed your language before God, it most certainly issues from an humble heart. The heart of the natural man thinks and feels the very opposite, and can no more loathe himself than transform himself into a holy angel.

Third, if you receive everything in the Scriptures *as a little child*, that is another proof that a miracle of grace has been wrought within you and that you now possess an humble heart. By nature, we are “wise and prudent” in our own esteem. Whatever may have been our early training, however, we may have been taught to revere God’s Word, yet there was that in us which rose up in opposition to some of its teachings. Proud reason rebelled at the mysteries of creation, the virgin birth, the Trinity. The enmity of the carnal mind rose up against the sovereignty of God, making one vessel to honour and another to dishonour; against the spirituality and strictness of the divine Law, which curses all who deviate the slightest from its holy demands; against the endless punishment of all dying out of Christ. But the regenerate, while there is much they do not understand, accept without murmur or question *all* that is revealed in the Word. *If you do*, that is proof that your pride has been abased before God.

Fourth, if you *mourn over the wretched returns* you make unto God, that is further evidence of an humble heart. Nor is that a point in any site difficult to determine. There is no need for you to make a mystery out of it. You know whether you do or do not sorrow over the response you make unto God for all His goodness unto you. You know whether or not you feel you have ill requited Him for the multitude of His favours and mercies. You know whether you do or do not grieve over the coldness of your heart in answer to His lovingkindness, the weakness of your faith in view of His promises, the feebleness—and perhaps the absence—of your praise and thanksgiving for His long-sufferance and faithfulness. If you *do* make conscience of these things, mourn over them, confess them—though

not as feelingly as you ought—that is another proof of an humble heart. As it is faith, and not the strength of it, which saves; so it is such mourning, and not the depth of it, which evidences its spirituality.

Fifth, if you frankly *ascribe to God all the good* that is in you, then you have an humble heart. If you freely own that all your springs are in Him, that He has wrought all your works in you (Isa 26:12), if you honestly *disclaim* any credit to yourself for any good thing, then your pride has been slain *before God*—and that is what most matters! If the language of your heart really be “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10), my “sufficiency is of God” (2Co 3:5), that He has worked in me both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phi 2:13), then most assuredly, your pride has been subdued. In such case, you will gladly unite in declaring, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory” (Psalm 115:1). You will take no credit for—nor should you deny the existence of—an humble heart, but will unhesitatingly give *God* all the honour and praise for it.

How thankful we should be that Scripture does not say, God dwells only in those who have complete victory over sin, or those who enjoy unbroken and unclouded communion with Him. Had those been the distinguishing features named, then every one of us might well despair—most certainly, they had excluded or “cut off” this writer. But we say again, a contrite and humble spirit takes in *every* regenerate soul. And if you, my reader, measuring yourself by what has been pointed out above, can discern such fruits and evidences of contrition and humility, then so far from its being presumptuous for you to look upon yourself as one saved and indwelt by God, it would be most wicked presumption for you to do otherwise.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

31. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 7 (3:19)

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). We devoted quite a little space to this fourth petition in our last, but not too much we hope, for we feel that several other things need to be said upon it. Probably it is this particular request in the prayer which has occasioned the most difficulty to our readers, and therefore, is the one on which they would most welcome help—and there is very little indeed to be obtained from the commentators. Before giving a more detailed exposition of what we conceive to be its meaning, let us outline its contents. It is a prayer that by viewing God objectively, believers may—through a contemplation of His manifold perfections—take into their renewed minds a full-orbed concept of His excellency. It also included such a contemplation of the Deity as would fill the mind with a satisfying view of all the Three Persons. In each of these instances, it would be more like unto the filling of a room with light as the sun shone through its windows. It was a request that God would communicate into us abundantly of His grace and comforts that we might be filled with His light and love—which would more resemble a vessel being fully supplied. It was also a request that we would be constrained to yield ourselves wholly unto God that He might fill and possess our entire being—like a king occupying the whole of the royal suite in his palace.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” Regard the expression relatively and comparatively. Paul longed that the saints might not rest content with a contracted and inadequate concept and apprehension of the divine character, but aspire after a well-balanced, full, and symmetrical view and experience of God. How many believers entertain a most limited idea of the divine perfections? Some almost restrict their thoughts to His majesty and sovereignty, some to His power and holiness, some to His love and grace; while others also take in His goodness, His faithfulness, His immutability, His righteousness, His longsuffering. We should not dwell on one or two of His glorious attributes only, to the exclusion of others; but should pray for and strive after a spiritual knowledge, and experimental acquaintance with each alike, that our minds and hearts may be filled with *all* His excellencies. We should pant after such views of His manifold glory as produce peace in the conscience, love in the heart, and satisfaction in the soul; occupied with the riches of His grace, the wonders of His wisdom, the miracles of His might, with *all* His blessed attributes, as engaged for His people and made over to them in the everlasting covenant.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” is not to be restricted unto the perfections of Deity abstractly considered, but is to be regarded as pertaining to all the Three Persons of the adorable Trinity. So we also understand it as signifying “filled with all the fulness of *the Triune God*”—and not of one Person only to the exclu-

sion of the Others. There are some denominations which make the most of the Father, some which make most of the Son, some which make most of the Spirit. Each is equally glorious. Each is equally interested in us: Our salvation is due to Their joint-operations and combined counsels; and therefore, They should have an *equal* place in our thoughts and affections. Confine not your minds to the grace of the Father in choosing and in so loving His people as to give His only-begotten Son for them, for we are required to “honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (Joh 5:23). Confine not your meditations to the amazing condescension and inconceivable sufferings of the Son on behalf of His saints, but contemplate also “the love of the Spirit” (Rom 15:30), as He quickened you when dead in sins, as He indwells you, as He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto you. Seek to be filled with the *Triune* God.

“Now we may be said to be filled with the fulness of God when the soul has a satisfying view of God’s love and grace, when it has views of God’s pardoning mercy and of the plenteous redemption which is in Christ, when the soul is led to view the riches of the Covenant of life and peace which is between the Father and the Son, and is led to see God in all His divine persons and perfections engaged for His people; and when by faith, we are enabled to see that the Father’s boundless love is toward us; that the Son’s salvation, with all its blessings, was wrought out for us and belongs unto us; that the Holy Spirit, with all the fulness of grace, will be in us in time and in eternity, as the fountain of endless comfort and joy. When also we see and are fully persuaded of our election by the Father, of our salvation by the Son, and of our regeneration by the Holy Spirit, we may be said to be filled with all the fulness of God. To be filled with the fulness of God is to have a blessed and spiritual view of the glories of divine grace, of the eternal and matchless excellencies of Jesus Christ, and from what we behold of Him in the light of the Spirit, to have our hearts drawn powerfully after Him and our souls resting confidently upon Him” (Sam E. Pierce).

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” First, by our contemplation of Him *objectively*: The affections of the new man drawing out the heart after its Author, faith enabling us to take in such satisfying views of Him as lead to intimate fellowship with Him, fill the soul with a real and absorbing knowledge of Him, and cause us to make Him our all-sufficient Portion. Second, by our receiving *subjectively* from Him, God communicating unto us out of the plenitude of His own being. To be filled with Him thus is to have Him imparting all that He can bestow upon us and all that we are capable of receiving. It is a request that the God of all grace would so shower down upon His saints His richest blessings, that they should have no further sense of want, or rather should have no aching emptiness. It is a request that we whose hearts had by nature been empty of any good, who had drunk only from the streams of this world—but to “thirst again” (Joh 4:13); who had experienced the insufficiency and vanity of all earthly things, might be filled to all satiety with what He bestows from Himself. It is a request for the amplest measure of His grace and consolation, that we may be filled with peace and joy, that no rival will have any power to attract us.

Having sought to explain “all the fulness of God” as it relates to our personal reception and enjoyment of the same, let us now consider more directly the “that ye might be filled.” Was not the apostle here praying that God might more fully possess us in a personal way, that we might be brought to *yield ourselves* more completely to Him? Think of the Christian being “filled” by and with God, not only as a dwelling may be filled with sunlight or a vessel with liquid, but also as a many-roomed house is completely occupied with guests. The saint desires that Christ should dwell in his heart by faith, but is there any restriction upon that desire? Is there any portion of his being marked “private”—reserved solely for *himself*? In other words, is there any part of his complex being not fully given up to God in Christ, which has not yet been consciously, and definitely, voluntarily, and gladly surrendered to His occupancy and sway? That is a searching question which each of us needs to honestly face. If there be any department of my outward life or any compartment of my inner man which is not fully surrendered to God, then I am *not* “filled” with Him. Am I really yielding my *entire* self to Him, so that I am sanctified in my “whole spirit and soul and body” (1Th 5:23)?

In our first article on this passage, we pointed out that it will help us not a little unto an understanding both of the scope of this prayer and the meaning of its petitions if we duly observe *the place* it occupies in this Epistle: At the close of the doctrinal section and as introductory to the practical portion, for it is a turning into supplication the contents of the former and a preparation of heart for obeying the precepts of the latter. Now among those precepts is this: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18)—that He should occupy us unreservedly, pervading the innermost depths of our beings, energizing and using all our faculties. Have we not reason then to pray, to pray earnestly and daily, that in *this* sense, too, we “might be filled”? Not merely that God may possess me in part, but wholly, that my obedience may be such as to personally receive the fulfillment of Christ’s promise: “My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). That the surrender of myself may be so complete that I may say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psa 103:1)—which I cannot do, unless all be freely dedicated unto Him.

How full and many-sided is this fourth petition! In addition to those meanings and applications of it dwelt upon above, we would point out still another, which for want of a better term, we will call its *practical* bearing—namely, that the Christian ought to be filled with a knowledge of God’s will. The believer should indeed have *His* mind upon all things, for to walk in darkness is one of the marks of the wicked. But let it be duly observed that we have placed this signification of the request last, for we shall not have light upon our path, nor divine wisdom for our problems, unless we are first fully yielded to God. Let us also call attention again unto the relation of this prayer to the section which follows it. Among the exhortations found in that portion is: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17), i.e. for all the details of our daily lives, for the various decisions we have constantly to make. Hence, in another of the prayers of this apostle, we find him asking for the saints “that ye might be *filled* with the knowledge of his *will*” (Col 1:9). It is not merely an innocent infirmity, but a sin which should humble us, whenever we are ignorant of it. If the Word dwell in us richly, if we be filled with the Spirit, then we *shall have* clear discernment, “good judgment,” a knowledge in all circumstances of that which will be pleasing to Him.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” While this was, we think, a request which, primarily, the apostle desired God’s people should receive a fulfillment of in *this* life, yet it is by no means to be restricted thereunto. Coming as it does at the close of the petitions, and in view of the language used in the next verses, it seems clear that Paul’s anointed eye was also looking forward to the endless ages of eternity—as ours should too. This view of the petition is also confirmed by the fact that the Greek may be legitimately rendered, “That ye might be filled *unto* all the fulness of God,” which, as previously pointed out, suggests the idea of a continuous process, a progressive and enlarging experience—for the ultimate aim of all genuine spiritual desire is to know God so intimately as to be filled to satiety by Him, which will only be when Heaven is reached. Here, human language fails us, for our minds are incapable of conceiving such ineffable heights of bliss. All we can say is that this request expresses an approximation to the supreme perfection, which is begun in this life and shall be forever growing in the holiness and bliss of the future state, though an infinite distance will ever remain between the Creator and the creature. Understood, thus, it is our being filled with all the *glory* of God.

Having considered the particular occasion or “cause” of this prayer, the character in which God is addressed, the rule or measure by which He is entreated to confer His favours, and the several petitions of it, we turn now to contemplate the *doxology* that concludes it. “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21). This doxology may be considered from two viewpoints. First, as an adoring outburst of the apostle’s own heart; and second—from the fact of its having been placed on record—as containing needful and valuable instruction for us. Any one with spiritual discernment will at once perceive that, from either of these viewpoints, it forms a most fitting climax and sequel to the prayer itself, constituting as it does a natural termination of it—a reverberation of praise unto the One supplicated. A “doxology” is an expression of adoration which rises above the level of ordinary speech, being more the language of ecstasy. It is a fervent utterance of praise; yet it is not so much the *act* of praise, as it is the realisation of the praise which is due unto God and the consciousness that He is due infinitely more than we are capable of rendering to Him. It is to lose ourselves in Him, overwhelmed with a sense of His ineffable glory.

“Paul’s prayer had apparently reached a height beyond which neither faith, nor hope, nor even imagination could go, and yet he is not satisfied. An immensity still lay beyond. God was able to do not only what he had asked, but infinitely more than he knew how either to ask or think. Having exhausted all the forms of prayer, he casts himself on the infinitude of God, in full confidence that He can and will do all that omnipotence itself can effect. His power, not our prayers, nor our highest conceptions, is the measure of the apostle’s anticipations and desires. This idea he weaves into a doxology, which has in it more of heaven than of earth” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). *That* is the first lesson we are to learn from it: that no bounds should be set upon our expectations from God. “They might stretch their thoughts, enlarge their desires, and multiply their most comprehensive petitions to the utmost, yet they never could reach the whole of what God was able to bestow upon them or what He honourably could do for them in Christ Jesus. Nay, all that yet remained to be done, in order to complete their felicity and glory in soul and body, only accorded to that power which had effected their redemption from the dominion of Satan and their new-creation to holiness” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

There are three things in that doxology which specially claim our attention: The particular character in which God is here contemplated—“He is able”; the standard to which faith should appeal in prayer—“the power that worketh in us”; the ascription of glory, concerning which we have: Its medium—“the Church”; its Agent—“Christ Jesus”; its perpetuity—“world without end.” Let us first consider how blessedly appropriate it is to view God thus in this particular connection. As experienced Christians well know, the certain effect of growing in a spiritual

knowledge of God and of the love of Christ is a deepening sense of our own weakness and unworthiness; and it is to meet this, we are here reminded that we have to do with One who is infinitely sufficient to supply our every need and satisfy our every longing. Do you ask, “How can such an one as I expect to obtain such wondrous privileges and enter into the enjoyment of such transcendent blessings as those expressed in the preceding verses?” Hear, and your weak faith shall be re-animated: He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20)! Or perhaps some reader has well-nigh lost heart and hope in the efficacy of prayer and has become almost stoically content with a state of comparative emptiness. If so, let him ponder Ephesians 3:20, for it reveals the remedy.

For us to be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith so that we be rooted and grounded in love, for us to be able to comprehend the dimensions and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and for us to be filled with all the fulness of God: Do such experiences seem visionary and impossible? They should not; they will not, if faith really views God as the apostle here did. Such experiences may indeed exceed anything we have yet attained unto, yea, transcend what we have even seriously thought of and prayed for; yet they *are* possible and realisable even in this life, “according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). It is the express design of the Spirit in recording this doxology to encourage us, to afford confidence in our approaches unto God, to enlarge our petitions. The Spirit’s purpose here is the same as was Christ’s in the closing section of that prayer which He gave unto His disciples: The children are to ask of their Father in heaven, remembering “*for thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever” (Mat 6:13). It is a confirmation of faith taken from the excellency of God—His ability, His sufficiency, His glory. However great be our need, His resources are illimitable; however powerful may be our foes, His power to deliver is infinite; however high may soar our desires, He can fully satisfy them.

It will be a great tonic for faith if we take to heart how frequently God is set before us in this most blessed character. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you” (2Co 9:8). “He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). “He is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phi 3:21). “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12). He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Yes, *He is able* to save, to succour, to subdue, to sanctify, to supply, to secure, to satisfy, and therefore, He is “able to do [for us] exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). In this character, God is viewed not only as the omnipotent, but also as the munificent One, as being not only all-powerful, but abundantly generous: God not only gives, but He “giveth to all *liberally*” (Jam 1:5). Very often, His liberality exceeds not only our deserts, but even our desires, bestowing upon us more than we have—either wisdom or confidence—to ask. Many illustrations of that fact are recorded in the Scriptures, and many met with in the experience of God’s children today.

Every Christian already has abundant proof that God can give him and do more for him than he can ask or think, for *He has already done so*! It was not in answer to my prayers that God elected me and inscribed my name in the Book of Life, for He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. It was not in response to any petition of mine that an all-sufficient Redeemer was provided for my Hell-deserving soul, for God sent forth His Son into this world to save His people from their sins nearly two thousand years before I had any historical existence. It was not in return for any urgent request of mine that the Holy Spirit quickened me into newness of life when I was dead in trespasses and sins: To pray for life is not a faculty of the unregenerate—rather does the new birth itself capacitate us unto the living desire and the spiritual longing. It is the impartation of life which causes the soul to long for more life. No, His people are spiritually dead and far from Him when He regenerates them, and thereby fulfills to all of them that word: “I am found of them that *sought me not*” (Isa 65:1). What evidences are these that God’s gracious dealings with us are high above not only all our deserts, but our desires, above even our faith and requests!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

11. Rahab (2:3-5)

“And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took [“had taken”] the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them” (Jos 2:3-5). This passage has presented some formidable difficulties to not a few of those who have carefully pondered it, and perhaps we can best help our readers by seeking to answer the following questions. First, did Rahab do right in defying the king’s authority and betraying her own country? Second, is she to be exonerated in the untruths she here told? Third, if not, how is Hebrews 11:31 to be explained?

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1). God requires us to render submission to human government: To be obedient to its laws, to pay the taxes it appoints, to cooperate in upholding its authority. Christians especially should set an example as law-abiding citizens, rendering to Caesar that which he has a right to demand from his subjects. Jeremiah 29:7 makes it clear that it is the duty of God’s people to seek the good of the country in which they reside—see the sermon by Andrew Fuller on “Christian Patriotism,” which appeared in these pages a year ago.³ There is but one qualification, namely, when the powers that be require anything from me which is obviously contrary to the revealed will of God, or prohibit my doing what His Word enjoins. Where such a case arises, my duty is to render allegiance unto God, and not unto any subordinate authority which repudiates His requirements.

The refusal of the three Hebrew captives to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image and Daniel’s defiance of the decree of Darius which forbade him praying unto God are cases in point (Dan 3:18, 6:10). We must never render to Caesar that to which God alone is entitled. “Fear God. Honour the king” (1Pe 2:17) indicates our relative obligations: God must be feared at all costs; the king is to be cheerfully and universally honoured, so far as that consists with my fearing God. When the religious powers forbade the apostles to preach in Christ’s name, they replied: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Act 5:29). It was thus with Rahab. There was a clash of interests: Loyalty to her king and country; loyalty to God and His servants. In the kind providence of God, such a dilemma is rarely presented to a saint today; but if it were, the lower authority must yield to the higher.

It is indeed the duty of a saint to seek the good of that country which affords him both shelter and subsistence; nevertheless, he is bound to love God and His people more than his country and fellow-citizens. He owes fidelity to the Lord first, and then to the place he lives in; and he is to promote the welfare of the latter so far as it is compatible with the former. In seeking to estimate the conduct of Rahab, we must carefully weigh Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25, and especially Joshua 2:9-11. From her language, it is manifest that she was fully convinced the Lord had purposed the destruction of the Canaanites; and therefore, she must either side with Him and His people against her country, or enter into a hopeless contest against the Almighty and perish under His judgments. By her actions, she exemplified what God requires from every truly converted soul: to renounce allegiance with His enemies—however closely related (Luk 14:26)—and refuse to join with them in opposing His people.

As one who had received mercy from the Lord—for Hebrews 11:31 evidences that sovereign grace had brought her out of darkness into God’s marvellous light before Joshua sent those men to reconnoiter—and as one who knew Jehovah had given the land of Canaan unto Israel, it was plainly the duty of Rahab to do all in her power to protect these Israelish spies, even at risk to her own safety. That principle is clearly enunciated in the New Testament: “We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1Jo 3:16). But now the question arises, in view of that being her duty, was Rahab warranted in resorting to falsehoods so as to protect the two men she had given shelter to? Different opinions have been formed of her conduct, and various arguments employed in the attempt to vindicate her. Some of the best commentators, even among the Puritans, pleaded she was guiltless in this matter; and we know of none who plainly stated that she sinned therein.

One of the most difficult tasks which confronts a Christian writer is that of commenting on the offences of God’s dear people: that on the one hand, he may not dip his pen in the pharisaic ink of self-superiority; and that on the other hand, he does not make light of any evil or condone what is reprehensible. He is himself compassed with infirmity and a daily transgressor of God’s law, and should be duly affected by a realisation of the same when deal-

³ *Christian Patriotism* – articles in the July and August, 1945, issues.

ing with the faults of his fellows. Nevertheless, if he be a servant of God, preaching or writing to the saints, then he must remember that “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1Co 4:2); and he is most certainly unfaithful if—even from a desire to be charitable—he deliberately lowers God’s standard of holiness, minimizes that which contravenes it, or glosses over anything which is culpable. Much grace and wisdom is needed if he is to act in both a spirit of meekness and righteousness, of compassion and fidelity.

It is one of the many evidences of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures that their Author has painted the conduct of the most eminent characters portrayed therein in the colours of reality and truth. Unlike human biographies, which almost always present a one-sided view—setting forth and extolling the virtues of its subjects and ignoring or toning down their vices—the Holy Spirit has not concealed the blemishes of the most distinguished saints: The lapses of Noah, Abram, Moses, David being faithfully chronicled. It is true that their sins are not mentioned in the New Testament, for the sufficient and blessed reason they were all under the atoning blood of the Lamb; nevertheless, the record of them remains on the pages of the Old Testament—left there as a lasting warning unto *us*. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that the sins of New Testament saints are not to be ignored, but to guide those whose task it is to comment thereon.

The prevarications of Rahab unto the king’s officers is appealed to by the Jesuits in support of their pernicious dogma, “The end justifies the means”: That if we aim at a praiseworthy object, it is permissible to use questionable or even evil means to attain the same—a principle which has regulated many so-called “Protestants” during the past century, and which is flagrantly flouted before our eyes today throughout Christendom, as seen, for example, in the carnal and worldly devices used to attract young people to “religious” services. But “let us do evil that good may come” is a sentiment entertained by no truly regenerate soul; rather it is detested by him; and Scripture plainly declares of such as are actuated by it that their “damnation is just” (Rom 3:8). Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the infamous champion of Popery, boldly declared in his work on “*De Romano Pontifice*” that “If the Pope should err in commending vice or forbidding virtue, the Church is bound to believe vice to be good and virtue to be bad” (Book 4, chapter 5).

Some have pointed out the exceptionally trying position in which Rahab found herself, arguing that considerable latitude should be allowed her therein. We are aware that appeal is often made to that aphorism, “Circumstances alter cases,” and while we are not sure what its originator had in mind, this we do know: that no “circumstances” can ever obliterate the fundamental distinction between good and evil. Let the reader settle it in his mind and conscience that it is *never* right to do wrong, and since it be sinful to lie, no circumstances can ever warrant the telling of one. It is indeed true that all transgressions of the divine Law are not equally heinous in themselves, nor in the sight of God—that some sins are, by reason of certain aggravations, greater than others, even of the same species. Thus, a lie unto God is worse than a lie unto a fellow-creature (Act 5:4), a premeditated and presumptuous lie is viler than one uttered upon a surprise by temptation.

It is also true that attendant circumstances should be taken into account when seeking to determine the *degree* of criminality: It would be a far graver offence for writer or reader to utter falsehoods than it was for Rahab, for we should be sinning against greater privileges and light than she enjoyed. She had been reared in heathendom; yet while that mitigated her offence, it certainly did not excuse her. One preacher who occupied a prominent pulpit in London asked the question: “Was Rahab justified in those falsehoods?” and answered in the affirmative, arguing, “She must either utter them or else betray the spies, and their lives would have been lost.” But that is the reasoning of unbelief, for it leaves out *God*. Had Rahab remained silent before the king’s officers, declining to give any information, or had she acknowledged that the spies were on her premises, was the Lord unable to protect them?

We much prefer the brief remarks of Thomas Ridgley’s to those of his contemporaries. “She would have been much clearer from the guilt of sin had she refused to give the messengers any answer relating to them, and so had given them leave to search for them, and left the event hereof to Providence.” Undoubtedly, Rahab was placed in a most trying situation, for as Ridgley went on to point out, “This, indeed, was a very difficult duty, for it might have endangered her life; and her choice to secure them and herself by inventing this lie brought with it a degree of guilt, and was an instance of the weakness of her faith in this respect.” That last clause brings us to the heart of the matter: She failed to fully trust the Lord, and the fear of man brought a snare. He whose angels had smitten the men of Sodom with blindness (Gen 19:11) and who had slain the fifty men sent to lay hands on His prophet (2Ki 1:9-12) could have prevented those officers finding the spies.

Some have gone even farther than exonerating Rahab, insisting that God Himself *approved* of her lies, appealing to Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 in support. But there is nothing whatever in either of those verses which intimates that the Lord sanctioned her falsehoods. Hebrews 11:31 says nothing more about this incident than that “she had received the spies with peace.” James points out that the faith of Rahab was “justified by works”—*not* by her

“words”—and then specified *which* “works,” namely, her receiving of the messengers and her sending them out another way. “But,” it may be asked, “Did not the workings of providence in the sequel go to show God approved of Rahab’s policy? Did He not give success to the same?” Answer: His providences are no Rule for us to walk by or reason from. Though water flowed from the rock which Moses smote in his anger, yet that was no proof God approved of His servant’s display of temper. God indeed graciously overruled Rahab’s conduct, yet that did not vindicate her.

We frankly acknowledge—though to our shame—that were we placed in a similar situation to the one which confronted Rahab, and God should leave us to ourself, we would acquit ourself no better than she did, and probably far worse. Yet that acknowledgement by no means clears her, for two wrongs do not make one right. If God’s restraining hand be removed, or His all-sufficient grace be withheld, the strongest of us is as weak as water. Therefore, none is in any position to point the finger of scorn or throw a stone at her. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) tersely summed up the case, “Her lie was an infirmity, pardoned by God, and not to be exaggerated by men.” It should be remembered that Rahab had only recently been brought to a saving acquaintance with the Lord. Many young converts have but little clear knowledge of the Truth, and therefore, less should be expected from them than mature saints. They make many mistakes, yet they have a teachable spirit; and as light increases, their walk is more and more regulated by the same.

In closing, let us point out one or two lessons which may be learned from what has been before us. First, we may see therein the refutation of a popular and widespread error—namely, that if our motives be right, the action is a praiseworthy one. It is quite true that an unworthy motive will ruin a good deed—as, for example, contributing to charity in order to obtain a reputation for benevolence, or in performing religious exercises so as to be seen and venerated by men—yet a good motive can never render an evil act a desirable one. Even though Rahab’s design was to protect the lives of two of God’s people, that did not render commendable the deception which she practised on the king’s messengers. Four things are required to render any action a “good work” in the sight of God: It must proceed from a holy principle, be regulated by the Rule of righteousness, be done in a right spirit of faith or love, and be performed with a right end in view—the glory of God or the good of His people.

Second, it is recorded—as in Holy Writ are all the failings and falls of the saints—as a solemn warning for us to take to heart. So far from furnishing examples for us to imitate or refuges for us to hide in, they are so many danger-signals for us to heed and turn into earnest prayer. We are men and women of like passions, as they were subject to. Native depravity still remains in us as it did in them, even after regeneration. In ourselves, we are no stronger than they were, and no better able to resist the inclinations of the flesh. What need has each of us, then, to pray, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa 119:117). And even when we are preserved from outward sins, the flesh obtrudes and defiles our best performances. It was “by faith” that Rahab received the spies with peace, and at risk to herself, concealed them on her roof; yet when the officers appeared on the scene, her faith failed, and she resorted to lying. Our godliest deeds would damn us if they were not cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ.

Third, this incident gives real point to and reveals our deep need of crying, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mat 6:13; Luk 11:4). Indeed, that seems the principal lesson to draw from: that I may be kept from any such situation in that, conscious of my weakness, I may be preserved from such a temptation as confronted Rahab. We deem it more than a coincidence that in the very midst of preparing this article, we heard—the first time in five years—from an old reader in Holland. During the last half of that time, while the enemy was occupying that country, our friend and his wife concealed three Jewesses in their home, and the last ten days before liberation actually had two German billeted with them; yet no discovery was made of their refugees. I know not what my friend had done if they had asked him point blank whether he was sheltering any Jews; but I am thankful not to be placed in such a situation myself.

Had I been in his place, I would have begged the Lord to keep from me any such interrogators and counted upon His doing so. Perhaps we may be pardoned for relating an experience—to the praise of the faithfulness of a prayer-hearing God. Some fifteen years ago when residing in Hollywood, California, we occupied a furnished bungalow. The owner was a typical Jewess, and when we gave notice of leaving, she put an advertisement in the local papers and stuck up a prominent sign, “To Let,” at the foot of our drive. Though she knew we kept the Lord’s Day holy and held a small service in our room each Sabbath evening, she insisted it was her right to show over the house those who answered the advertisement. We protested strongly, but she would not heed, saying “Sunday” was always her best letting day. We then told her that our God would keep away all applicants on the coming Sabbath, which she heard with derisive scorn.

That Saturday evening, my wife and I spread the matter before the Lord and begged Him to cause His angel to encamp round about us, and protect us by keeping away all intruders. During the Sabbath, which was a cloudless

day, we continued seeking God's face, confident He would not put us to confusion before our landlady. Not a single caller came to look over the house, and that night, we held our little meeting as usual, undisturbed!—one of those present will read these lines, though not until he does so will he know what has been related. Next day, our landlady, who owned two similar bungalows, stated it was the first time in her ten years' experience of letting that she had ever failed to let on a "Sunday." Ah, my reader, God *never* fails those who trust *Him* fully. He will protect you if you confidently count upon Him. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11. Its Criteria

Up to this point, we have dealt almost entirely with the expository side of our subject; now we turn to what is more the experimental aspect of it. Some of our readers will consider this the most important and vital part; while to others, it will make no appeal, being in their judgment better omitted. Those who read principally for intellectual information most appreciate that which supplies new light on things, explains to them what is obscure, or opens to them a difficult passage of Scripture; but they often look with disfavour on that which calls upon them to diligently inquire what *use* they are making of the light they have received—to what practical ends are they turning their new knowledge. Yet this should be the principal concern of each of us. The interpretation of a passage of Scripture is but a means to an end: The personal appropriation and application of it to my own heart and life is the great desideratum. The value of a book, or of an article, lies chiefly in this: Does it help to deliver its reader from the evil powers of this world and serve to assist him in his journey heavenwards?

Though the other aspects of this grand truth which have been before us may both interest and instruct the mind, yet they will afford little real comfort and lasting peace to the heart, until I am personally satisfied that I am reconciled to God, and He is reconciled *to me*. It deeply concerns each one of us to ascertain whether the wrath of God or the smile of God be upon him, whether the Law curses him or pronounces him righteous. It is a matter of utmost moment for us to determine whether we be the serfs of Satan or the friends of Christ, whether we be in a state of nature or of grace. We are plainly warned in Scripture that, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is *not washed* from their filthiness" (Pro 30:12); and if I really value my eternal interests, then I shall seriously and solemnly inquire, "Am I one of that deluded company? Am I numbered among those who sincerely believe that they have been cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ, but are sincerely mistaken?" More than a mere inquiry needs to be made: There should be an earnest and definite investigation.

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2Co 13:5)—yet that is the very task which the great majority of professing Christians refuse to undertake; and if it be pressed upon them, they see no need for an engaging therein, firmly assured that all is well with them spiritually. It is natural for us to think well of ourselves; yet just to the extent that we are influenced by self-esteem will our judgment be prevented from forming a true estimate of ourselves. And while self-love and self-flattery rule our hearts, we shall decline this essential duty of self-examination. Pride produces presumption, so that its infatuated victims are secure in their conceit that they are heirs of Heaven, when in fact, they have neither title nor meetness thereto. Those thus bewitched cannot be induced to prosecute a course of self-examination, nor will they tolerate a searching and probing ministry—be it oral or written.

What madness has seized those who treat lightly what should become of their souls in eternity! And those who are unwilling for their profession to be thoroughly tested are as truly numbered in that class as those who make no religious profession. Do you say, "There is no need for *my* profession to be tested, for it is a valid one, seeing that for years past, I have been resting on the finished work of Christ." But my reader, God Himself *bids* those claiming to be His people, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*" (2Pe 1:10); and He has given no needless exhortations. O, pit not your vain confidence against infinite wisdom. Bare your heart to the Sword of the Spirit: Shrink not from a faithful and discriminating ministry. Know you not that Satan employs a variety of tactics in seeking to keep a firm hold upon his captives? And one of them is to prevent his deluded victims engaging in this very investigation—lest they should discover that, after all, their hope has rested on a foundation of sand.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved [discovered]” (Joh 3:20). Does not that *place* those who refuse to examine themselves whether they be in the faith and decline to be “weighed in the balances of the Sanctuary”? It certainly does: It ranks them among evil-doers. Despite all their religious pretensions, the solemn fact is that they “*hateth* the light” which exposes an empty profession; and therefore, they “neither cometh to the light” to be tested by it. And why is this? Because they lack an *honest* heart which desires to know the truth about themselves, no matter how unpalatable it be. Therefore, it is that they find most distasteful and discomfiting those sermons or articles which point out the differences between hypocrites and the sincere, and which show how closely the former may, in many ways, resemble the latter. Even if they began the work of self-examination, it would prove so obnoxious as soon to be abandoned, and being under the power of a “heart [that] is deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9) would give themselves the benefit of the doubt.

But different far is it with those in whom a work of grace has been wrought. They have been made to realise something of the deceitfulness of sin and the awful solemnity of eternity; and therefore, refuse to give themselves the benefit of any doubt, being determined at all costs to find out where they stand before God. Of each of them, Christ declares: “But he that doeth truth [is genuine and sincere] cometh to the light, that his [profession and] deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [by] God” (Joh 3:21). He longs to know whether he be in a state of nature or of grace, and if his assurance of the latter be based on a conjectural persuasion or well-authenticated evidence; whether his faith in Christ be a natural one, or “the faith of God’s elect” (Ti 1:1); whether his repentance be “the sorrow of the world” which “worketh death,” or that “godly sorrow” which “worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of” (2Co 7:10). There is hope for a man who is deeply exercised over such matters; but there is none for those who are complacently satisfied with a false peace.

Readiness to be searched and probed by the Word of God, willingness to go to much pains to learn whether I be treading the Narrow Way which leadeth unto Life, or whether I am on the clean side of that broad road which terminates in destruction is a good sign. As there is nothing that a hypocrite dreads more than to have his rottenness exposed, so there is nothing which an honest heart more longs to know than the real truth about his state before God. The earnest prayer of such an one is: “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psa 26:2). But alas, those who are filled with a carnal confidence feel no need of begging the Lord to “prove” *them*, for they are quite sure that all is well with them. Nay, so completely deceived are they by Satan, they imagine it would be an act of unbelief to do so. Poor souls, they “call evil good, and good evil,” and “put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isa 5:20).

“Examine me, O LORD, and prove *me*” (Psa 26:2). Is that the cry of *your* soul, my reader? If it be not, then there is strong reason to fear you are yet fatally enthralled by Satan. One of the surest marks of regeneration is that such a soul cries frequently, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:23-24). Yet it should be pointed out that this must not be made a shelving of our responsibility, a substitute for the performance of our own duty. God hath bidden us, “Examine *yourselves* whether ye be in the faith” (2Co 13:5); and every possible effort must be made by us to do so, taking nothing for granted, but resolutely and impartially scrutinising our hearts, measuring ourselves by the Word, ascertaining whether or not we have the marks and evidences of regeneration. Like the Spouse, we should say, “Let us get up *early*...let us see if the vine flourish” (Song 7:12).

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2Co 13:5) clearly implies that a knowledge of our spiritual state *is* possible. As the natural man perceives his own thoughts, knows what views and motives regulate him, and is acquainted with his own designs and aims, so may the spiritual man be. “Reflection and knowledge of self is a prerogative of a rational creature. We know that we have souls by the operations of them. We may know that we have grace by the effects of it, if we be diligent. As we may know by the beams of the sun that the sun is visible, if we shut not our eyes (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). Grace discovers itself in its affections and actions, in its operations and influence on the heart and life. If we observe closely the springs of our actions and “commune with” our own heart (Psa 4:4), we should have little difficulty in becoming acquainted with the state of our souls. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1Co 2:11).

In His parable of the Sower and the Seed, our Lord likened those who hear the Word unto different kinds of soil which received the Seed, and the various results or yields therefrom. His obvious design therein was to supply us with criteria by which we may *measure ourselves*. If, then, I would properly examine myself, I must ascertain if I am no better than the wayside hearer, who received the Word with an evanescent “joy” and yet had “no root” in himself (Luk 8:13) and soon fell away; or the thorny-ground hearer, who suffered the “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mat 13:22) to choke the Word and render him unfruitful. Or, if by grace I be a good-ground hearer, of whom it is said—not simply that he “believes the Gospel,” but—“which in an honest and good

heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luk 8:15). *That* is the test: Not knowledge, orthodoxy, or happy feelings, but FRUIT.

Unless a man knows himself to be a child of God, he cannot rationally or lawfully take comfort from the promises which are addressed unto the saints. It is madness and presumption for me to flatter myself that God has declared He will do this and that for me, unless I am reliably assured that I am one of those to whom such declarations are made. It is the height of folly for me to believe that all things are working together for my good, unless I really love God (Rom 8:28). On the other hand, if I be regenerate and decline to take comfort from the promises, I forsake my own mercies and allow Satan to deprive me of my legitimate portion. That it is not God’s will for His people to remain in uncertainty is unmistakably clear from 1 John 5:13: He moved one of His apostles to write a whole Epistle for the express purpose that they might *know* they had eternal life, and that they may believe (more confidently) on the name of the Son of God.

Realising full well that this is the most momentous investigation that any mortal can ever undertake, that sincere souls—conscious of how much is involved—will proceed carefully and cautiously, and making full allowance that an honest heart will be fearful of being deceived in the matter, yet we have never been able to understand why a regenerate soul should find it so difficult to determine whether he be in a state of nature or of grace. We are very much afraid that not a few of God’s dear people have been hindered by the teaching they sat under and the general custom which prevailed in the circle where they were. It is indeed deplorable that many Protestants have echoed the dogma of Popery that it is presumptuous for any Christian to aver he *knows* that he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. The New Testament contains not a word in support, but much to the contrary. For a saint to doubt his acceptance by God is not a mark of humility, but the fruit of unbelief.

We have been dealing with the Christian’s assurance of his state before God in a more or less general way. Let us now be specific and ask, “How is an exercised soul to ascertain whether he has really been restored to the favour and friendship of God? By what criteria or rules is he to test himself in order to discover whether God be at peace with him? By what evidence may he be rationally assured that he is *reconciled* to the moral Ruler and Judge of this world?” Surely that should not be difficult to determine. Is it possible for a truly converted person—who has passed through a radical change in his heart and life, in his thoughts, affections and actions—to yet know nothing about it? Surely a person cannot be awakened out of a state of security in sin, to realise what a vile, unclean rebel he is, and to mourn over the same—and yet perceive nothing about it. For one to radically change his selfish and worldly pursuits, to lose relish for his idols, and to live a life of communion with God—and yet be uncertain such is his case—is impossible.

Grace is as evident in its own nature as corruption is; and its operations and fruits are as manifest and unmistakable as are those to sin. Not only so in ourselves, but in our fellow-saints too. In a time like the present, it is particularly easy to recognise those who are truly reconciled to God. The few *friends* of Christ stand out conspicuously among the vast multitude of His enemies. In a day when lawlessness abounds and every man does “which was right in his own eyes” (Jdg 21:25), those whose lives are ordered by God’s Word cannot be mistaken. They “shine as lights in the world,” “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phi 2:15). Noah “walked with God” (Gen 6:9)—though he lived in the midst of the reprobate antediluvians. Elijah was jealous for the glory of God and faithful in maintaining His cause—though his lot was to dwell amid a people who had forsaken God’s covenant, thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets (1Ki 19:14).

It may be easier—we are by no means sure it is so—for one to serve God faithfully in a season of revival, than in one of declension; and to journey Heavenwards in the company of a goodly number, than to stand alone—but it is more difficult to identify the saints. As the fire evidences the pure gold, so a day—either of bitter persecution or of wide-spread apostasy—enables us to discern who are out and out for the Lord, and those who have nothing more than a thin veneer of religion. When many of Christ’s nominal disciples went back and walked no more with Him, He turned to the apostles and asked, “Will ye also go away?” (Joh 6:67). Whereupon, Simon Peter acting as their spokesman said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (Joh 6:68). “They have made void thy law. *Therefore* I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Psa 119:126-127)—such is the effect upon a true child of God of the defection of his fellows.

But returning to the individual who would ascertain whether or not he be reconciled to God. That problem may be reduced to a simple issue: You are either an enemy of God, or the friend of God—plainly manifesting the one or the other in your conduct. It should not be difficult for you to determine in which class you are. “And you, that were sometime [“afore”] alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Col 1:21). The implication is unescapable: If you have been reconciled to God, then you are no longer fighting against Him; and though as yet, you are very far from being perfect, or all that you should be; nevertheless, no longer is your

mind enmity against Him—ever engaged in wicked works. Nay, if reconciled, the very opposite is the case: You yearn for closer fellowship with Him, you love His Word, honestly endeavour to be regulated by it in all things, and in your measure, are bringing forth good works.

Yes, the issue is a very simple one: To be reconciled to God is for there to be mutual peace between Him and you; and peace is the opposite of war, as love is of hatred. It therefore follows that no soul who is at peace with sin can possibly be at peace with God—for sin is the open enemy of the Holy One. The question to be decided then is: “Have I thrown down the weapons of my warfare against the Most High? Have I enlisted under the banner of a new Captain?” If I be honestly and resolutely fighting against sin, then I must be reconciled to God. Said Christ to His disciples, “For he that is not against us is on our part” (Mar 9:40). There is no third condition: You are either for, or against, God—His friend, or His foe. God’s enemies are opposed to Him, leagued with all that is hostile to Him, doing what He forbids and flouting what He enjoins. If then I desire to please Him, am I on the side of His friends, hating what He hates and loving what He loves—must I not be one with Him!

CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21). This is a general exhortation which sums up much of what has been set forth in the fourth and fifth chapters of this epistle. It is founded upon the grand truth of the unity of the mystical Body of Christ, being addressed to the saints; in whom, as living members of that Body, in the building up of which they are both individually interested and personally responsible, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon each (Eph 4:1-7, 16). When bidding them, “speak every man truth with his neighbour,” it was at once added, “*for* we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). Holding firmly to the Head of faith, they were to walk in the power of that Spirit who secured them in Christ for salvation and joined them to each other in His love (Eph 5:18-20). Above all, it was to be kept in their remembrance that corporately, they were God’s “temple” (Eph 2:19-21), and individually, His “children” (Eph 5:1); and so were exhorted to “walk in love” (Eph 5:2) and “in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21). Therefore, they should submit themselves not only to God in their individual relation to Him, but also to one another.

Ephesians 5:21 is also to be regarded as standing at the head of that section of the epistle which runs on to the end of Ephesians 6:9, enunciating the general principle which is illustrated by the details of the verses that follow. “Submitting yourselves one to another” certainly does not signify that true Christianity is a species of spiritual communism, which reduces all to one common level. So far from breaking up the ordinary relations of life and producing disorder, lawlessness, and insubordination, it confirms every legitimate authority and makes each just yoke lighter. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God...Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom 13:1, 7). “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” (Heb 13:17). “Fear God. Honour the king” (1Pe 2:17). “Submitting yourselves one to another”—according to your different situations and relations in the church and in the community, and that subjection which is established by God’s Word and ordered by His providence.

This call to mutual subjection, then, not only crowns the series of precepts going before, but is also made the foundation of an exposition of Christian deportment in those natural and social relations to which special obligations belong, and in which Christians are likely to find themselves placed. The Gospel does not abolish civil distinctions, but binds the believer unto a keeping of the order set up by God. In the light of what immediately follows, where wives are enjoined to be in subjection to their husbands, children to their parents, and servants to their masters, some have concluded that “submitting yourselves one to another” signifies nothing more than “render obedience unto whom it is due.” But this is an unwarrantable narrowing of its scope to restrict it unto the duty of inferiors to superiors, for the terms of this injunction are not qualified. Nor does such a limitation accord so well with other Scriptures. But more: Such an interpretation is not in keeping with what follows—for husbands, parents, masters are also addressed, and *their duties* pressed upon them.

While the duty of the wife’s subjection to her husband is insisted upon, yet the obligations of the husband to his wife are also enforced. If children be there required to render obedience to their parents, the responsibility of fathers

is also stated. While servants are instructed how to conduct themselves unto their masters, the latter are taught to treat their employees with due consideration and kindness. There, too, the *balance* is blessedly preserved. Power is not to be abused. Authority must not degenerate into tyranny. Law is to be administered mercifully. Rule is to be regulated by love. Government and discipline must be maintained in the state, the church, and the home; yet governors are to act in the fear of God, and instead of domineering over their subjects, seek their good and serve their interests. Christians are not to aspire after dominance, but usefulness. Self-denial rather than self-assertiveness is the badge of Christian discipleship. Saints are likened unto sheep, and not goats or wolves. Submitting yourselves one to another means mutually serving one another, and seeking each other's wellbeing and advantage in all things.

"Sin is the transgression of the law" (1Jo 3:4)—that is to say, it is a revolt against God's authority, a defying of Him, a species of self-will. Sin chafes at any restraints determined to have its own way. Sin is self-centered, imperious, and indifferent to the welfare of others. Yokes and restrictions are intolerable unto sin, and every attempt to enforce them meets with opposition. That resistance is evinced from earliest infancy, for a thwarted babe will cry and kick because not suffered to have its own way. Because all are born in sin, the world is filled with strife and contention, crime and war. But at regeneration, a principle of grace is communicated, and though sin be not annihilated, its dominion is broken. The love of God is shed abroad in the renewed heart to counteract its native selfishness. The yoke of Christ is voluntarily assumed by the believer, and His example becomes the Rule of his daily walk. Made a member of His body, he is henceforth to lay himself out in promoting the interests of his brethren and sisters. He is under bonds to do good unto all men, especially to those who belong to the Household of Faith.

It is because sin indwells the Christian, he needs to have this injunction, "submitting yourselves one to another" frequently pressed upon him. Such is poor human nature that when a man is elevated to a position of honour, even though it be a regenerate man who is called to serve as a deacon, he is prone to lord it over his brethren. A most solemn warning against this horrible proclivity is found in Luke 22:24: "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." That strife was among the twelve apostles, while they sat in the Saviour's presence after the Supper! Alas, how little has that warning been heeded! How many since then have aspired for the precedency. How often a spirit of envy and strife has been engendered by those who strove for superiority in the churches. How few realise that doing good is better than being great; or rather, that the only true and noble greatness consists in being good and doing good—to spend and be spent in the service of others. Greatness is not being toadied unto, but ministering to those less favoured.

Nevertheless, there *is* a subordination and condescension appointed by God which we are required to observe. This is true of *ecclesiastical* power. God has ordained that there shall be teachers and the taught, governors and the governed. He raises up those who are to have the supervision of others, and they are required to subordinate themselves to their authority (Heb 13:17). But their rule is administrative and not legislative, directive more than authoritative, "and managed by a council rather than a court," as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) expresses it. Here, too, there must be *mutual* submission, for in both governors and the governed, there is mutual service. The governors themselves are but "ministers" (1Co 4:1): They have indeed an honourable office, yet they are only *servants* (2Co 4:5) whose work is to feed the flock, to act as directors or guides by word and example (1Ti 4:12). Though they "are over you in the Lord" (1Th 5:12), yet not "as being lords over God's heritage" (1Pe 5:3); but as motivated by love for souls, seeking their edification, gently endeavouring to persuade, rather than compelling and tyrannizing.

There is also *political power*, or governmental authority, in the civil state, which is God's ordinance and unto which His people must yield for His sake. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1Pe 2:12-13). Thus, there is an obligation of conscience to submit unto our civil governors, both unto the supreme and the subordinate magistrate—the only exception being when they require something from me which clashes with God's Rule, for to act contrary to *that* would be defiance of divine authority; and therefore, would be for the devil's sake rather than the Lord's. Honour, subordination, and obedience are due unto the ministers of state; nevertheless, they, in turn, are under the divine dominion, "for he is the *minister* of God to thee for good" (Rom 13:4). The magistrate, the member of the cabinet (or senate), and the king himself, are but the servants of God, to whom each must yet render an account of his stewardship; in the meantime, each must perform his duty for the good of the commonwealth, *serving* the interests of those under him.

So, too, of the *economical power*, that of the husband, parent, and master. There are not only duties pertaining to those relations, but mutual obligations wherein the power of the superior is to be subordinated to the interests of the inferior. The husband is the head of the wife, and she is required to own him as her lord (1Pe 3:6); but that gives him no right to act as a tyrant and make her the slave of his lusts. He is under bonds to love and cherish her, to give honour to her as unto the weaker vessel, to seek her happiness and do all in his power to lighten her burdens. Par-

ents are to govern their children and not to tolerate insubordination, yet they must not provoke them to wrath by brutal treatment, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, teaching them to be truthful, industrious, honest, looking after the good of their souls, as well as bodies. Masters are bidden to give unto their servants, “that which is just and equal; knowing that” *they* also “have a Master in heaven” (Col 4:1) who will sanction no injustice and condone no harshness. God has so tied us one to another that everyone is to do his part in promoting the common good.

Power is bestowed upon men by God, not for the purpose of their self-exaltation, but for the benefit of those they rule. Power is to be exercised with goodwill and benevolence, and deference is to be rendered by the subordinate—not sullenly, but freely and gladly, as unto God. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but *by love serve* one another” (Gal 5:13) interprets for us “submitting yourselves one to another” (Eph 5:21). It is the *mutual* submission of brotherly love which is there enjoined, of that love which “seeketh not her own” (1Co 13:5), but ever labours for the good of its objects. It is that mutual subjection which one Christian owes to another, not seeking to advance himself above his fellows and domineer over them, but which is selfless, bearing one another’s burdens. It is in the exercise of *that* spirit that we please God, adorn the Gospel, and make it manifest that we are the followers of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. It is by mortifying our pride and selfishness, by the exercise of mutual affection, and by discharging the office of respect and kindness unto the children of God, we show forth that we have passed from death unto life.

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom 12:10). The Greek word there for “preferring” signifies “to take the lead or set an example.” Instead of waiting for others to honour or minister unto me, I should be beforehand in deferring unto them. Where Christian love be cultivated and exercised, there is a thinking and acting respectfully unto our brethren and sisters. “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phi 2:3). That does not mean the father in Christ is to value the opinions of a spiritual babe more than his own, still less than he is to feign a respect for the spirituality of another which he does not honestly feel. But it does signify that if his heart be right, he will so discern the image of Christ in His people as to make deference in love to them both an easy and pleasant duty, putting their interests before his own; and judging himself faithfully, he will discover that “the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8) suits no man better than himself. The exercised and humble believer will rather put honour on his brethren than seek it for himself.

If then God has called you into the ministry, it is not that you may ape [mimic] the peacock, or set yourself up as a little pope. You are not called to lord it over God’s vineyard, but to *labour in it*, to minister unto His people. The greatest of the apostles declared, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself *servant unto all*, that I might gain the more” (1Co 9:19). But One infinitely greater than Paul is your Pattern. Behold Him humbling Himself to perform the most menial office, as He girded Himself with a towel, stooped down, and washed the feet of His disciples! And remember, it is unto the ministers of His Gospel that He said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (Joh 13:14-16). A haughty and arrogant spirit ill becomes *His* servants.

That holy balance between “call no man your father upon the earth” (Mat 23:9) and “submitting yourselves one to another” (Eph 5:21) was perfectly exemplified by the Lord Jesus who, though God incarnate, was also Jehovah’s Servant. If on the one hand, we find that He refused to be in bondage to the doctrines and commandments of the Pharisees (Luk 11:38; Mat 15:2), and overrode their traditions with His authoritative, “I say unto you” (Mat 5:20-22, etc.); on the other hand, we behold Him submitting unto every ordinance of God, and perfectly exemplifying every aspect of lowly submission. As a Child, He was “subject unto” His parents (Luk 2:51). Ere He began His ministry, He submitted to be baptized of John, saying, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Mat 3:15). He sought not His own glory (Joh 8:50), but rather the glory of the One who sent Him (Joh 7:18). He denied Himself food and rest that He might minister to others (Mar 3:20). The whole of His time was spent in going “about doing good” (Act 10:38). He bore patiently and tenderly with the dullness of His disciples, and broke not the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax (Mat 12:20). And He has left us an example that *we* should follow *His* steps.

Submitting ourselves one to another means, according to each, the right of private judgment and respecting his convictions. It imports a readiness to receive counsel and reproof from my brethren, as David did when he was king (Psa 141:5). It connotes a cheerful denying of self as to seek their good. It signifies doing all in my power to minister unto their holiness and happiness. As one of the old worthies put it, “The saints are ‘trees of righteousness’ whose fruit is to be eaten by others; candles, which spend themselves in giving light and comfort to those about them.” To obey this precept, we require to be clothed with *humility*. It is the proud who cannot endure subjection,

and who consider it beneath them to lend a helping hand to those less favoured. *Love* must be warm and active, if superiors and inferiors are to treat one another with kindness and respect. Where love reigns, none will be disdained or slighted. “In the fear of God,” this submission is to be rendered: In conscience to His command, with a regard for His glory.

THE EARTH

Part 1

“The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” (Psa 111:2). The works of the Lord in creation, providence, and grace are “great”—prodigious, wonderful, perfect. Each of them is worthy of our most attentive consideration, careful examination, and prayerful contemplation. Those works—whether in the natural sphere or the spiritual—evidence and display the perfections of the Workman; and it will be both to our pleasure and profit to seek them out and ponder what they have to teach us, both concerning God Himself and His care for us. The Hebrew word which is here rendered “sought out” is elsewhere translated “enquired,” “examined,” “regard.” It is a comprehensive term which signifies, “to diligently investigate and thoughtfully weigh.” If only we have eyes to see, hearts to perceive, and ears to hear, the very ground we walk on and every object in “Nature” preaches a sermon to us on God’s wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness. What follows illustrates our meaning: It is an excerpt from the Letters of James Hervey (1714-1758).

This terraqueous globe is intended not only for a place of habitation, but a storehouse of conveniences. If we examine the several apartments of our great abode, if we take a general inventory of our common goods, we shall find reason to be charmed with the displays both of nice economy and of boundless profusion.

Observe the *surface* of this universal message. The ground course, as it may seem, and trodden by every foot, is nevertheless the laboratory where the most exquisite operations are performed; the shop, if I may so speak, where the finest manufacturers are wrought. Though all generations have, each in their order, been accommodated by its productions, though all nations under Heaven are, to this very day, supplied by its liberalities, it still continues inexhausted. It is a recourse always new, a magazine never to be drained.

As this is a property very remarkable and unspeakably valuable, it deserves our more particular regard. Was it reversed, what would become of the world, both rational, animal and vegetable? In commercial affairs, *usury* is looked upon as the canker of an estate: A corroding worm which eats into the heart, and consumes the very vitals of our substance. The earth borrows immense sums yearly, and these she repays with an interest prodigiously large, almost incredible. Yet is she never impoverished! Or if impoverished in some degree the repose of a single year, with a little cultivation from the owner is sufficient for the reparation of all her losses. *Old age* weakens the most vigorous animals. Even the hardiest oaks are impaired by time. A state of barrenness and decay awaits them all, and admits neither of prevention, nor of remedy. But the earth, which is the mother and nurse of us all, is subject to none of these infirmities! She is now almost six thousand years old, yet discovers no sign of a broken constitution, nor any one symptom of exhausted strength. In spring, she blooms like a virgin; in summer, she sparks like a bride; in autumn, she teems like a matron. If gray hairs seem to be upon her during the wintry months, she is sure to drop them when the frosts are gone and the sun approaches. She never fails at that season to re-assume all the graces and to re-exert all the vigour of youth. Though she has been pregnant with thousands and thousands of vintages and harvests, though she has suckled unnumbered millions of green and flowery families, her womb is as strong and lively to conceive, her breasts are as copious and milky to nourish, as if she was but just delivered of her first-born. To what is this unequalled and ever-ceasing fertility owing? What but that mighty Word proceeding from the mouth of Jehovah: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest...shall not cease” (Gen 8:22). How short the decree, but how long and lasting its efficacy! It has reached to this hour, it will reach to distant ages, it will extend itself to the very end of Time.

Here are *quarries* stocked with stones, inferior in beauty to the jeweler’s ware, but much more eminently beneficial. Which, when properly ranged and cemented with a tenacious mortar, form the convenient abodes of peace, and build the strongest fortifications of war: Defending us from inclement weather and the more formidable as-

saults of our enemies. They constitute the arches of the bridge which convey the traveler with perfect security over the deep and rapid stream, enabling both man and horse to pass with easy intercourse from one bank of the broadest river to another. These give us the rocky girdles of our quays, and strengthen the arms, the stupendous arms of the mole; which stretch themselves far into the ocean, curb the impetuosity of the surge, and screen the helpless barque; which tempestuous waves, like a savage disappointed of its prey, foam, and rage around.

These stony treasures are comparatively *soft* while they continue in the bowels of the earth, but acquire an increasing *hardness* when exposed to the open air. Was this remarkable peculiarity reversed, what difficulties would attend the labours of the mason! His materials could not be extracted from their bed, nor fashioned for his purpose, without infinite toil. Suppose his work completed, it would not long withstand the fury of the elements, but insensibly mouldering or incessantly decaying would elude the expectations of the owner; perhaps might prove an immature grave, instead of a durable dwelling.

Here are vast *layers of clay*, which, however contemptible in its appearance, is abundantly more advantageous than the rocks of diamond or the veins of gold. This is moulded with great expedition and ease into vessels of any shape and of almost every size. Some so delicately fine, that they compose the most elegant and ornamental furniture for the tea-table of a princess. Others, so remarkably cheap, that they are ranged on the shelves and minister at the meals of the peasant. All so perfectly neat that no liquid takes the least taint, nor the nicest palate any disgust from their cleanly services. The Creator, who never forgets and never neglects even the meanest of the people, has distributed this most necessary kind of earth in the greatest abundance. It is found in every country, almost in every field. It lies near the surface, and is obtained with little labour, and with very little expense. Thus hast Thou, O God, of Thy goodness, prepared for the poor.

Which shall we most admire, the bountiful heart, the liberal hand, or the all-discerning eye of our great Creator? How observable, how admirable is the precaution in removing these useful, but cumbrous, wares from the superficies, and stowing them in proper repositories or lumber-rooms beneath our feet! Were they scattered over the surface, the ground would be choked and embarrassed with the enormous heaps. Our roads would be blocked up, and scarce any portion left free for the operations of husbandry. Were they buried extremely deep, or sunk to the centre of the globe, it would cost us immense pains to procure them; or rather, they would be quite inaccessible. Were they uniformly spread into a pavement for Nature, the trees could not strike their roots, nor the herbs shoot their blades; but universal sterility must ensue. Whereas, by their present disposition, they furnish us with a magazine of metallic without causing any diminution of our vegetable treasures. Fossils of every splendid and serviceable kind enrich the bowels, while bloom and verdure embellish the face of the earth.—*James Hervey, published 1789.*

AUGUST

THE THREEFOLD MARVEL

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15). It will at once be obvious to a spiritual mind that no human pen, however gifted, could begin to do justice to such a verse as this; rather is he likely to detract from its sublimity and depreciate its grandeur in the estimation of the reader. It is one of those outstanding declarations of Holy Writ which is stamped so unmistakably with the autograph of its divine Author. The mind of the creature could not have invented it, for the thoughts of a fallen being would never soar to such heights, conceive of such an ineffable Object as is here presented to our view, nor have imagined such an amazing act on His part as here predicated of Him. As a whole, it exhibits a threefold marvel and miracle.

First, a marvel and miracle of *divine condescension*, namely, that of the Highest and the lowest meeting together. Our estimation of the stupendous and amazing nature of this marvel will be proportioned by our concept of the greatness and majesty of the Lord God. Alas, that in our day, this is so little perceived even by the majority of those who profess to be His people. So little does the modern pulpit set forth the perfections of Deity; yea, so wretchedly is He caricatured, that He has good reason to say of those in the pew, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa 50:21): Feeble, fickle, compromising—unable to accomplish His purpose, swayed by the events of time, indifferent to sin. It is not, too, such to say that the God of Scripture is “THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Act 17:23) of modern Christendom. The “god” of the “churches” possesses scarcely any of the attributes of the living God, but is instead, a disgusting figment of their own perverted imagination and corrupt sentiments.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One” (Isa 57:15), He is the One “who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?...Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing...All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” (Isa 40:12-18). Pause, my reader, carefully ponder those words; and then ask yourself, “Is there not a real and pressing need for me to revise, yea, radically alter my concept of this mighty and majestic Being?” “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isa 44:6).

The God of Scripture is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1Ti 6:15-16). If that were more clearly grasped by our minds, and if it more powerfully influenced our hearts, we should stand in awe of such an One, and in astonishment, exclaim with one of old, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth?” (1Ki 8:27). Such was the wondering exclamation of Solomon upon the completion of the temple—probably the most remarkable and imposing building ever erected by man on this earth—the placing of all its sacred vessels in their proper places, and the dedication of the whole. For Jehovah to take up His abode therein seemed to him a thing incredible, impossible. Considering His immensity, he went on to say, “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1Ki 8:27).

The One whom the heavens are incapable of containing cannot be circumscribed in place nor held by space, being infinite and omnipresent. The Heaven is His throne and the earth is His “footstool”—shall then the King of glory occupy *that* for His seat! Can such an One take up His abode in a human heart? Surely such a thing is far beyond the widest stretch of imagination. What! That He “who humbleth himself to [so much as] behold the things that are in heaven” (Psa 113:6) should deign to tabernacle in a worm of the earth is utterly beyond comprehension. That He who is infinite should make His home in one that is finite had never been thought of by mortal mind. That He who “inhabiteth eternity” (Isa 57:15) should indwell a creature of time, what is it but indeed a marvel and miracle of condescension—one which should bow us before Him in overwhelming wonderment and worship.

Yet Jehovah is not only the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, but “whose name is *Holy*” (Isa 57:15): His very nature is ineffably pure. To His immaculate eyes, the heavens themselves are unclean (Job 15:15), “the stars are not pure in his sight” (Job 25:5). “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). If, then, it be a thing incredible for the great God to dwell on the earth, if it would be a thing comprehensible for Him to tabernacle in a finite creature of time—even if that creature were himself sinless—what shall it be for One who is infinitely Holy to dwell within one that is fallen, corrupt, and vile? That is indeed a marvel and miracle of grace—appreciated only in proportion as we apprehend *Who* He is and what *we* are! We read that “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Isa 11:6), and that is a miracle of nature; but for the Holy One to indwell a sinner is a miracle of miracles, the transcendent marvel of grace.

Yes, it is not only a marvel of condescension that the infinite God should indwell a finite creature, but it is also a miracle of *divine mercy* that the ineffably Holy One should take up His abode in the heart of a fallen and sinful creature. Were it not that the Word of Truth clearly and repeatedly taught this, we had not dared to affirm it, nor even imagine such a wonder for ourselves. “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly” (Psa 138:6). O that our hearts were duly affected by His peerless benignity. If they were, we should exclaim with the Psalmist, “Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people” (Psa 113:5-8). The high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10).

“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15). That exhibits to us, third, a marvel and miracle of *divine power*. By nature, there are none of “a contrite and humble spirit.” So far from it, all the fallen children of Adam are in love with sin and self. The world over, the unregenerate are intractable, impenitent, proud, and self-willed. It is only by the supernatural operations of divine power that the wild are tamed, the stout-hearted made contrite, and the haughty become lowly. Above, we have said that the great God takes up His abode in a worm of the earth, yet it is not one considered as a “worm of the earth” that He does so. No, rather is it as one upon whom the Lord had set His heart from before the foundation of the world, as one redeemed by Christ and cleansed by His precious blood, as one who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit, as one who has thrown down the weapons of his warfare and surrendered to the claims of God, as one who has been made a new creature by the might of Omnipotence. Wonder and adore at this threefold marvel and miracle.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

32. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 8 (3:20-21)

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). In connection therewith, let the Christian reader honestly face the Lord’s own question: “Believe ye that I *am able* to do this?” (Mat 9:28). Unless we are much mistaken, quite a number will reply, “Yes, I believe He is able to do so for me, but I fear that He may not be *willing* to.” If such be your answer, then you are very much mistaken—not only about Him, but also about yourself. If you really think that God is able to bring you into a closer walk and more constant fellowship with Himself, that He is able to make all grace abound toward you and fill you with Himself, but doubt His willingness to do so, then your heart is deceiving you and causing you to think more highly of yourself than you have any right to do. The fact is, dear friend, you do not believe He is able; if you *did*, you would not doubt His willingness. You do not agree with that statement, but rather indignantly deny it, saying, “Surely I know myself better than you do! *I know* that I believe implicitly in the omnipotence of God, but I often question whether He is willing to exercise it on my behalf.” We repeat, You are sadly mistaken.

Suffer us to be faithful with you, dear reader. If such be your assertion, then you are flattering yourself. Sin is blinding your judgment. Your heart is more deceitful than you realise; your case is far worse than you will allow. You have too good an opinion of yourself. You are trying to hide your wicked unbelief under the fair cover of humility. You persuade yourself it would be presumptuous to entertain the assurance that God is willing to work miracles on your behalf, and congratulate yourself that your doubting such a thing is a mark of lowly-mindedness. How you delude yourself! You may indeed believe intellectually in the ability and all-sufficiency of God, but your heart has not laid hold of the same. If it had, you would not call into question His willingness. The fact is that you entertain a horribly-distorted view of God. In reality, you fondly imagine that you are more anxious to receive spiritual blessings than He is desirous of bestowing them; that you are more willing, more concerned about your spiritual prosperity than He is. Call things by their proper names. Hide your face for shame. Confess to God your excuseless unbelief and cease posing as a very humble person.

God does not mock His people by declaring to them that “He is able” when at the same time, He is unwilling. Re-examine the passages quoted in our last: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25)—does not that include His willingness? Of course it does. “He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18); yes, and willing, too—or such a word would have no comfort in it. “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12)—what assurance could that give me, if He were unwilling to “keep”? When the Lord rebuked the skeptical laughter of Sarah, was it because she questioned His willingness, or because she doubted His power? The latter, as is clear from His challenge: “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (Gen 18:13-14). When He rebuked Moses for his unbelief, was it because he distrusted God’s willingness, or might? Clearly the latter: “Is the LORD’S hand waxed short?” (Num 11:22-23). And if you really believed in

God's omnipotence, you would promptly avail yourself of it! You would say, "Lord, I know that Thou art able to undertake for me; and therefore, I count upon Thee doing so."

"He is able" is a brief, but comprehensive, affirmation of God's goodness, willingness, sufficiency, and munificence. Because God is good, He withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly (Psa 84:11) and makes all things work together for good to them that love Him (Rom 8:28). Because God is good, He is willing and ready to supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phi 4:19). Because He is God, He is self-sufficient: No creature can thwart Him, no situation dismay Him, no emergency arise which is beyond His resources. Because God is munificent, He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). Because God is the all-mighty and all-sufficient One, He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). What a God is ours! How different from the creature! Have we not in some hour of need appealed to one of our fellows who had the wherewithal to succour, but refused? And have we not witnessed a fond mother anxious to relieve her suffering child, but was unable to do so! But the One with whom the Christian has to do, his Father in Heaven, has both the willingness and the power.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). How different would be many of our prayers if we always viewed God thus when approaching His mercy-seat! If faith regarded Him in this character, our petitions would be framed accordingly, and our confidence would be greater and more honouring to Him. Each word in that wonderful sentence should be duly weighed, and its cumulative and climacteric force grasped by us. God is not only able to do what we "ask," but also "think"—some of our thoughts are beyond expression in words. He is able to do *all* that we ask or think, not merely some or even most of them, but even our loftiest conceptions. But more: He is able to do *above all* what we ask or think, exceeding our highest aspirations and largest requests. Better still: He is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think—O that the Holy Spirit would enable us to understand that and our faith to obtain a better grip upon it. Best of all, He is able to do "*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" Human language is utterly incapable of expressing the infinite sufficiency and illimitable bounty of the One to whom prayer is addressed, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9) is His own declaration.

For the further encouraging of our hearts and strengthening of our faith, let us consider some recorded examples of God's answers far exceeding the requests of His people. "And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" (Gen 15:2)—he asked for a son. What was the response made by the bountiful Giver? This: "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen 15:5)! Jacob's thought rose no higher than "bread to eat, and raiment to put on" (Gen 28:20), but the divine munificence bestowed upon him "oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants" (Gen 32:5). The Hebrews had been quite content to remain in Egypt if deliverance from bondage was granted them (Exo 2:23), but God brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey! David asked life of God, and He not only gave him "the request of his lips," but bestowed upon him a throne as well (Psa 21:1-4). Solomon sought "an understanding heart" (1Ki 3:9) and God not only supplied it, but said, "I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour" (1Ki 3:13).

And has it not been thus with each of us? Has not the bountiful One given above our expectations? Go back, my brother, my sister, to the dawn of your Christian life. Recall the season when you were under conviction of sin and a weighty sense of the wrath of God oppressed you: Did your desires at that time ascend any higher than to be delivered from the everlasting burnings and be granted an assurance of pardon? Bring your mind back to that time when you were painfully aware of being in the far country, where you sought in vain to find satisfaction in the husks that the swine feed on, and when you cried, "I perish with hunger" (Luk 15:17). At that time, did your aspirations go beyond that of the prodigal? Had you not been quite content if the Father made you one of His "hired servants" (Luk 15:19)? Ah, how truly did He then do exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or thought! He gave you such a welcome as you never dreamed of. He greeted you with such manifestations of love as completely melted your heart. He decked you out with clothing befitting His favoured child. He spread a feast before you and filled your heart with merriment. And my friend, He has not changed! He is still the all-bountiful One!

It is because He has not changed that He presents Himself before you as He does here in Ephesians 3:20. He would have you contemplate Him as the all-sufficient One. He would have you view Him thus when you approach the Throne of Grace—as the One whose resources are illimitable, whose ability to use them is infinite, and whose willingness so to do is demonstrated once for all in giving His only-begotten Son for you and to you. That was the confidence and assurance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when Nebuchadnezzar appointed that they should suffer a horrible death, if they refused to worship the golden image which he had set up. Hear their intrepid reply:

“We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so [that you really mean to carry out your threat], our God whom we serve is *able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and *he will* deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Dan 3:16-17). With faith steadfastly fixed on God’s power, they had no doubt whatever about His willingness! And that—together with the glorious sequel—is recorded for *our* instruction, as well as our encouragement. Again, we say, God has not changed! He is still the omnipotent One!

Ponder carefully the following passage concerning Abraham: “Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:18-21). To carnal reason, it seemed an impossibility that the infirm Sarah should bear the patriarch a son in his old age, but he refused to be dismayed by the insuperable obstacles as presented to sight. To “experience” too, the situation also appeared hopeless; but that also daunted him not. He was strong in faith. Why? Because he had a tight grip on God’s promise. He was “fully persuaded” (Rom 4:21). How? Because his heart relied upon the infinite sufficiency and all-mighty power of the Promiser. That was what sustained, yea, rejoiced him, while waiting the fulfillment of God’s promise. God did not disappoint him! This too is recorded for our learning. Once more, we say, God has not changed: He is still El Shaddai—the all-sufficient One.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to”—what? According to His sovereign pleasure? According to His eternal decree? According to His secret will? No, true though that be; yet it was not that which the heart of the apostle was here occupied with! What then? “According to the *power* that worketh in us.” Say what we may, plead as plausibly as we please of our uncertainty about God’s willingness to show Himself strong on our behalf; at the bottom, it is our wicked unbelief, our doubting of His *power*, our secret questioning of His ability to extricate us from such and such a predicament, or furnish a table for us in the wilderness. It was at that point the faith of Zacharias failed—doubting the power of God to make good the word He had given through the angel (Luk 1:18-20). It was his questioning of Christ’s power that caused Him to chide Peter with “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Mat 14:31). It was because the apostles lacked confidence in His omnipotence that none of them expected Him to rise again on the third day. It was not His willingness, but His power, which they doubted. So it is with us.

He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” is the particular character in which we should ever view God as we approach the mercy-seat: “According to the power that worketh in us” is the standard to which faith should ever appeal in prayer. It is that wondrous power of which we already have personal experience. It is a *mighty* power, for it brought us from death unto life and called us out of darkness into His marvellous light: “For God, who [in Gen 1:3] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts” (2Co 4:6). It is an *invincible* power, for it subdued our inveterate enmity, overcame our stubborn obstinacy, and made us willing to receive Christ as our Lord and King, to take His yoke upon us and submit to His scepter. It is a *holy* power, for it caused us to repudiate all our righteousness as filthy rags and made us nothing in our own sight. It is a *gracious* power, for it wrought within us not only when we had no merits of our own, but when we had no desire to be subjects of it. It is a “*glorious* power” (Col 1:11), for by it, all our godly affections are sustained and all our acceptable works wrought.

It is an *infinite* power—“whereby he is able even to subdue *all* things unto himself” (Phi 3:21). Sinful corruptions cannot thwart it, Satan and his hosts cannot hinder it, death and the grave cannot defy it. That power can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, can make the blind to see, and the dumb to sing. That power can restore the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25), and give “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:3). However urgent may be our situation, that power can relieve it; however great our need, that power can supply it; however potent our temptations, that power can deliver us; however sore may be our trials, that power can support us in them; however distressing our circumstances, that power can keep our hearts in perfect peace. It is an *eternal* power. It is not one which becomes exhausted by expenditure. It never wearies or diminishes; and therefore, since it has begun a good work within us, it will most certainly complete the same (Phi 1:6). It will yet make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight (Heb 13:21).

Let us now point out the *use* we should make of what has been before us. 1. The language of this doxology ought to deeply *humble* us. Its lofty terms rebuke our groveling petitions and expectations. Look at it again—we cannot ponder it too frequently! “Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”: Should not that make us thoroughly ashamed of our petty requests, our

feeble anticipations, our low spiritual attainments? We need to realise the fact that there is such a thing as a modesty in our asking which *dishonours* God, that we come far short of seeking from Him that which accords with His benevolence and bounty. We are coming to a king and should therefore “large petitions with us bring.” “Is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jer 32:27) is His own challenge: No matter how sore our strait, or how staggering our difficulty, it will be as nothing to Him. Alas, how like are we unto Joash, who, when bidden by the prophet to smite upon the ground, smote three times and “stayed,” when he should have smitten “five or six times” and thereby obtained a far greater victory (2Ki 13:18-19).

2. It should greatly *encourage us*. Was not that one of the patent purposes of the Spirit in recording this doxology?—to raise the expectations of God’s people. And in order thereto show them how faith should view God! It is most important that the saints should at all times contemplate God as the infinitely-sufficient One; but it is peculiarly necessary they should do so as they are about to approach Him in prayer. Nothing is more calculated to enlarge our desires, warm our hearts, and deepen our confidence than to regard Him as here set forth. We ought not to be straitened either in our thoughts of Him or expectations from Him. “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psa 81:10) is His own gracious invitation and assurance. Men may talk of receiving “sips” of His goodness and ‘bites’ of His bounties, but that is something to be ashamed of rather than to proclaim with satisfaction. “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Song 5:1) tells out His heart unto us. As the Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677) well expressed it: “God’s bounty is not only ever flowing, but overflowing.” The fault is wholly ours if we have but “sips” from it.

3. It should serve as a *challenge unto us*. The language of this doxology is but God saying to us in another way, “Prove Me now herewith. Bring your hard problems to Me. Spread your deep needs before Me. Make known your largest spiritual desires unto Me, and count upon My sufficiency and bounty.” As William Carey (1761-1834) counseled, “Ask great things of God, and expect great things from Him.” Question not His willingness, for that is reflecting on His goodness and doubting His benevolence. Suffer not Satan to deceive you any longer with a feigned humility, under the pretence of deterring you from spiritual arrogance and forwardness. Recall the case of those who brought unto Christ the one sick of the palsy, who, when they could not reach Him because of the press, broke through the roof and let down the bed on which the sufferer lay! Was the Lord displeased at their “impudence”? No; indeed, He honoured the faith of those who so counted upon His compassion and grace. When the centurion besought Him on behalf of his sick servant, did Christ rebuke him for his “presumption”? No; He “marvelled” at his faith (Mat 8:10; Luk 7:9). O my reader, He delights to be trusted.

4. It should *instruct us*. Having presented the petitions recorded in verses 16-19, the apostle closes with this adoring doxology: “Now unto him that is able...Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21). We often beg the Lord, “Teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1). He has already furnished us with the necessary instructions, both in His own prayers and in those given us through His apostles! In them, He has plainly revealed that we should be deeply concerned with *the glory* of God, that it should actuate and regulate us in all our supplications. In that prayer which He taught His disciples—and after which ours should always be patterned—He bade us conclude our addresses unto the Father with, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Mat 6:13). It is not only that those words should be upon our lips, but that the substance and sentiment of them should ever affect our hearts, that we should make the glory of God our one supreme and constant aim, that we should ask only for those things which will promote His honour, and that we should make that our prevailing plea in the preferring of all our requests. “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake” (Psa 79:9)!

It is at this very point that we may clearly perceive one of the great differences which exists between the spiritual believer and the carnal professor. The formalist and the hypocrite never seek unto God (except when, Pharisee-like, he would parade himself before men), but under the pressure of his *own* needs and not from any concern of God’s honour. But the upright seek unto God, because they delight in Him and desire communion with Him, and their love to Him makes them deeply concerned for His glory. When their God is dishonoured, they grieve sorely: “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa 119:136 and compare Eze 9:4). The regenerate prefer God’s interests to their own and set *His* glory high above *their* comforts and concerns. In *that*, they follow the example which Christ has left them: “Father, save me from this hour”—that was the innocent inclination of His humanity. “But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify *thy* name” (Joh 12:27-28)—He subordinated everything to that.

It is fitting, then, that we should conclude our prayers thus. As Matthew Henry says, “When we come to ask grace from God, we ought to give glory to God.” To give glory to God is to ascribe all excellency unto Him. “Unto him be glory” (Eph 3:21): That was the adoring language of one whose heart was filled with love to God. It was an

expression of fervent praise to Him, because He is the all-sufficient and bounteous One. If God be spiritually viewed as the Fountain of all blessings, whose fulness is inexhaustible, whose resources are illimitable, whose benignity is infinite, then the soul cannot but burst forth in acclamation, “unto him be glory.” It was also an avowal of expectation. The apostle was assured that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ *would* grant the petitions which he had just presented, and he gives thanks for the same. This is the ground of the saint’s confidence: that God has joined together His glory and our good. His honour is bound up in promoting the interests of His people: “That *we* should be to the praise of *his* glory” (Eph 1:12). The possession which Christ purchased is “unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14). “Glorified in his saints” (2Th 1:10).

“Unto him be glory” (Eph 3:21) was the homage of the apostle’s own heart. Then it was as though he felt his own personal worship was altogether inadequate, and so he added “in the Church”—let all the redeemed unite with me in exalting Him. The Church is indeed the grand seat of His glory: It is “The branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified” (Isa 60:21). “Israel my glory” (Isa 46:13) He calls her. None do, none can truly honour and acknowledge Him, but the Church. But the apostle knew that even the Church—ordained though she be as the subject and instrument of the divine glory—is yet not equal to the task, and so he added, “by Christ Jesus.” As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) so beautifully put it: “Thou, Lord Jesus, Thou art He alone among men eloquent enough to express the glory of God. Grace is poured into Thy lips, and Thou canst declare our praises.” But even then, the apostle was not satisfied: “Throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph 3:21)—that a revenue of praise should be paid Him during all generations, and that eternity itself should never cease to resound with the glory of God! And what more suitable response can *we* make to such sentiments than by adding our “*Amen*”!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

12. Rahab (2:6-11)

Little as Joshua may have realised it, he was divinely impelled and directed to send forth the two spies to “go view the land, *even Jericho*” (Jos 2:1). Why so? Because there was one of God’s elect residing in that city, and none of His sheep shall perish (Joh 10:27-28). Unto that vessel of mercy were they led, in order that arrangements should be made for her protection, so that she “perished not with them that believed not” (Heb 11:31). There was, then, a *needs be* why those two spies should visit Jericho and converse with Rahab—not merely a military needs be, but one far more vital and blessed. It is still another example of what we have, on several occasions, called attention to in these pages—namely, that when God works, He always works at *both* ends of the line. As it was in the case of the Ethiopian and Philip the evangelist, and of Cornelius and Peter, so it was here. Before those two men set foot in Jericho, the Lord had already wrought—signally and savingly—in the heart of Rahab; and now, opportunity is afforded for her to confess her faith, to receive a token for good, and to be made a blessing unto others.

The needs be for those spies entering Jericho reminds one of John 4; and there are some striking parallels between what is recorded there and the case of Rahab. First, we are told of the Lord Jesus that “He must needs go through Samaria” (Joh 4:4). That “must” was not a geographical, but a moral one. From all eternity, it had been ordained that He *should* go through Samaria. There was one of God’s elect there, and though she was “alienated from the common-wealth of Israel” (Eph 2:12), being a Samaritan, yet she could not be ignored: “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I *must* bring” (Joh 10:16) declared the good Shepherd. There were those in Samaria whom the Father had given Him from before the foundation of the world, and them He *must* save. And, my reader, if you be one of God’s elect, even though now unregenerate, there is a needs be put on the Lord Jesus to save *you*. For years, you have been fleeing from Him, but when the appointed time arrives, He will overtake you. You may kick against the pricks, as did Saul of Tarsus, but He will overcome your rebellion and reluctance, and win you to Himself.

Second, not only was the one whom Christ was constrained to seek and save in John 4 a woman and a Gentile, but she was one of loose moral character. Said He to her, “Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband” (Joh 4:18). Such too had been this chosen one in Jericho: Defiled both in mind and body with idolatry and adultery—“Rahab the harlot.” Many of God’s elect—though by no means all of them—fall into gross wickedness in their unconverted days: Fornicators, idolaters, thieves, drunkards, extortioners: “And *such were*

some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1Co 6:9-11). How illustriously is the sovereign mercy and invincible might of God displayed in the conforming of such unto His image! "Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen" And why so? "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1Co 1:26-29), that His wondrous *grace* might the more clearly appear.

But grace does not leave its subjects in the condition in which it finds them. No; indeed, it appears, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Ti 2:12-13). Saving faith is ever accompanied by evangelical repentance, which mourns over past sins and resolves to avoid a repetition of them in the future. Saving faith ever produces obedience, being fruitful in good works. Those who are the recipients of God's grace are not only grateful for their own salvation, but are concerned about the salvation of others, especially of those near and dear to them by nature. When Christ stood revealed to the Samaritan adulteress, she "went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" and "many...believed on him" (Joh 4:28-29, 39). So too Rahab asked for kindness to be shown her father's house, and her whole family found deliverance (Jos 2:12-13, 18). But we are anticipating.

The case of Rahab is worthy of our closest attention, for it exemplifies and magnifies the riches of divine mercy in many striking respects. Born and brought up in heathendom, belonging to a race that was to be exterminated, her salvation was a signal display of God's dominion, who not only singles out whom He pleases to be the recipients of His favours, but is trammelled by nothing in the bestowal of them. "She was not only a Gentile, but an Amorite, of that race and seed which, in general, was devoted to destruction. She was, therefore, an instance of God's sovereignty in dispensing with His positive laws, as it seemed good unto Him, for of His own mere pleasure, He exempted her from the doom announced against all those of her original and traducion" (John Owen, 1616-1683). Being the supreme Potentate, God is not bound by any law or consideration other than His own imperial will, and "therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom 9:18).

In God's saving of Rahab and bringing her into the congregation of His people, we may perceive a clear and glorious foreshadowing of the fuller scope of His eternal purpose, as it is now made more plainly manifest in this New Testament era. Since Rahab was a Canaanite, she was by nature cut off from the Abrahamic stock, and therefore, a stranger "from the covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12). By her conversion and admission into the congregation of Israel, she was obviously both a type and a pledge of the calling of the Gentiles and their reception into the mystical Body of Christ. Thus did coming events cast their shadows before them. In such cases as Rahab and Ruth, God gave an early intimation that His redemptive purpose was not confined to a single people, but that it reaches out unto favoured individuals in all nations. Their incorporation by marriage among the Hebrews was a blessed adumbration of the "wild olive tree" being grafted in and made a partaker of "the root and fatness of the [good] olive tree" (Rom 11:17). Such we believe is, in part at least, the typical and dispensational significance of what is here before us.

But the outstanding feature of this remarkable case is the free and discriminating grace of God toward her. Not only did Rahab belong to a heathen race, but she was a notorious profligate, and in singling her out to be the recipient of His distinguishing and saving favour, God made it evident that He is no respecter of persons. By her choice, she was given up to the vilest of sins, but by the divine choice, she was predestinated to be delivered from the miry pit and washed whiter than snow by the precious blood of Christ, and given a place in His own family. It is in just such cases as her that the unmerited favour of God shines forth the more resplendently. There was nothing whatever in that poor fallen woman to commend her to God's favourable regard, but where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound, bestowing upon her His unsolicited and unearned favours—the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23), the gift of saving faith (Eph 2:8-9), the gift of evangelical repentance (Act 5:31). He is indeed "the God of all grace" (1Pe 5:10); and as such, He is a giving and freely-conferring God, and not one who barter and sells. His bestowments are "without money and without price," imparted to spiritual bankrupts and paupers.

Not only may we behold in Rahab's case the exercise of divine sovereignty and the manifestation of divine grace, but we may also pause and admire the wondrous working of God's power. This is best perceived if we take into careful consideration the virtually unparalleled element which entered into it: Here the Holy Spirit wrought almost entirely apart from the ordinary means of grace. There were no Sabbaths observed in Jericho, there were no Scriptures available for reading, there were no prophets sounding forth messages from Heaven; nevertheless, Rahab was quickened unto newness of life and brought unto a saving knowledge of the true God. The Lord Almighty is not restricted to the employing of certain agencies, nor hindered by the lack of instruments: He deigns to use such,

or dispenses with them entirely as He pleases. He has but to speak, and it is done; to command, and it stands fast (Psa 33:9). It is to be duly noted that this woman who had previously walked in open sin was regenerated and converted *before* the spies came to her house: Their visit simply afforded an opportunity for the avowal and public manifestation of her faith.

It is quite clear from both the Old and New Testament that Rahab was converted before the two spies first spoke to her. Her language to them was that of a believer: “I *know* that the LORD *hath* given you the land...for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Jos 2:9, 11)—yea, such assurance puts many a modern professing believer to shame. “*By faith* the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31). Summing up the whole of her conduct on that occasion, Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out: “It cannot therefore be reasonably doubted her faith had, before this, been accompanied with deep repentance of those sinful practices from which she derived the name of ‘Rahab the harlot’”—with which we heartily concur. But some, who have been poisoned with the errors of dispensationalism, and others who are slaves to the mere letter and sound of the Word, are likely to object, saying *that* is a gratuitous assumption, for the word “repentance” is never found in Scripture in connection with Rahab. For their benefit, we will devote another paragraph or two unto this subject.

“Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15); “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). A contrite spirit and a heart acceptance of the Gospel are inseparably connected, so that wherever the one is mentioned, the other is presupposed. For example, take the passages recording the Gospel commission: In Mark 16:16, the emphasis is on “believing,” while in Luke 24:47, it is on “repentance”—the two together explaining the “make disciples” of Matthew 28:19-20. The one cannot exist without the other: It is just as morally impossible for an impenitent heart to believe, as it is for an unbeliever to repent. There may indeed be a mental assent to the Truth unaccompanied by any brokenness of heart, as there may be natural remorse where no faith exists; but there can be no saving faith where evangelical repentance is absent. Since the faith of Rahab was a saving one, as Hebrews 11 clearly shows, it must have been attended with godly sorrow for sin and reformation of life. There can be no pardon while there is no repentance (Isa 55:7, Luk 24:47, Act 3:19), i.e. mourning over and abandoning of our evil ways.

Repentance is a change of mind—one that goes much deeper and includes far more than a mere change of opinion or creed. It is a changed mind, a new perception, an altogether different outlook on things as they previously appeared. It is the necessary effect of a new heart. Repentance consists of a radical change of mind about God, about sin, about self, about the world. Previously God was resisted; now He is owned as our rightful Lord. Previously sin was delighted in, but now it is hated and mourned over. Previously self was esteemed, but now it is abhorred. Previously we were of the world and its friendship was sought and prized; now our hearts have been divorced from the world, and we regard it as an enemy. Everything is viewed with other eyes than formerly, and an entirely different estimate is formed of them. The impenitent see in Christ no beauty that they should desire Him, but a broken and contrite heart perceives that He is perfectly suited to him. Thus, while He continues to be despised by the self-righteous Pharisees, He is welcomed and entertained by publicans and sinners. Repentance softens the hard soil of the soul and makes it receptive to the Gospel Seed.

Repentance necessarily leads to a change of *conduct*, for a change of mind must produce a change of action: Repentance and reformation of life are inseparable. It must have been thus with Rahab: She who had been a harlot would become chaste, and a life of wanton pleasure would give place to one of honest work. Some may deem our conclusion a ‘far-fetched’ one; but personally, we consider that we are given a plain intimation of her changed manner of life. In Joshua 2:6, we are told that “she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of *flax*, which she *had* laid in order upon the roof.” As there is not a superfluous nor meaningless word in the Scriptures, why then has the Holy Spirit specified the particular kind of straw which Rahab used to cover and conceal the two spies? Now “flax” was labouriously gathered by the industrious women, laid out on the flat roofs of the houses to dry, and was then used for spinning and weaving. The presence of a quantity of it “laid out” on Rahab’s roof was an evidence she was now living a useful life.

But that is not all the presence of the “flax” tells us. If we go to the trouble of searching our concordance and comparing Scripture with Scripture, we discover something yet more praiseworthy. In the last chapter of the book of Proverbs, we are supplied with a full-length portrait of “a *virtuous* woman,” and one of her features is that “she seeketh wool, and *flax*, and worketh willingly with her hands” (Pro 31:13)! Such we are assured was now the character and occupation of this outstanding monument of mercy. Another mark of repentance is a changed esteem of and attitude toward the people of God: Formerly their presence irritated, for their piety condemned us; but when the heart be changed by the operations of divine grace, their company and communion is desired and valued. It was

thus with Rahab and the two Israelites: She “received the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31) is the divine testimony. It was not with reluctance and complaint that she accepted them into her abode, but with a spirit of goodwill, welcoming and giving them shelter. Admire, then, the blessed transformation which the operations of the Spirit had wrought in her character.

Let us now consider more particularly her faith. First, the *ground* of it. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). This does not mean that faith is *originated* by hearing the Word of God, any more than that the shining of the sun imparts sight to the eye. No, faith is bestowed by a sovereign act of the Spirit, and then it is instructed and nourished by the Word. As an unimpaired eye receives light from the sun and is thereby enabled to perceive objects, so faith takes in the testimony of God and is regulated thereby. My acceptance of the Truth does not create faith, but makes manifest that I *have* faith; and it becomes the sure ground on which my faith rests. Unto the spies, Rahab said, “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have *heard* how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you” (Jos 2:9-11).

How marked the contrast between Rahab and that generation of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness! They not only “heard” of, but were the actual eye-witnesses of those wonderful prodigies which Jehovah wrought on behalf of His people. They personally saw Him cleave a way for them right through the Red Sea, so that they passed through it dryshod; and then His causing the waters to come together again to the drowning of Pharoah and his hosts. They beheld the solemn manifestation of His august presence on Sinai. They were the daily recipients of a supernatural supply of food from Heaven, and drank of water which was made to gush from a smitten rock. But their hearts were unaffected and no faith was begotten within them. They too “heard” God’s voice (Heb 3:7-8), but responded not, and therefore, were debarred from the promised land: “They could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Ah, my reader, something more than the beholding of miracles, or witnessing outward displays of God’s power, is required in order to beget faith in those who are spiritually dead, as was evidenced again in the days of Christ.

How marked the contrast, too, between Rahab and the rest of her compatriots! As her words in Joshua 2:9-11 clearly indicate, *they too* heard the same reports she did of the marvels performed by the Lord’s might; yet they produced no faith in them. They were indeed awestruck and terrified by the accounts of the same that reached them, so that for a season, there did not remain any more courage in them; but that was all. Just as under the faithful preaching of God’s servants, many have been temporarily affected by announcements of the Day of Judgment and the wrath to come, but never surrendered themselves to the Lord. God declared unto Israel, “This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee” (Deu 2:25). That was literally fulfilled in the case of the inhabitants of Jericho, yet it wrought no spiritual change in them, for they were children in whom was no faith; and they had no faith, because no miracle of grace was wrought in their souls. Of itself, the soundest preaching effects no spiritual change in those who hear it.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11b. Its Criteria

We commence this portion at the point where we left off in our last: Those who are at peace with sin are at enmity with God; but those who are reconciled to God are antagonistic to sin. It cannot be otherwise: Satan and God, sin and holiness, are diametrically and irreconcilably opposed. As the “sceptre of righteousness” (Heb 1:8) holds sway over the Kingdom of God and of Christ, iniquity is the dominant power in the empire of Satan: “He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1Jo 3:8). It therefore follows that all real Christians are opposed to Satan as the common enemy, and evince the same by fighting against sin. Satan’s principal work lies in drawing men to sin; and therefore are the saints bidden, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam 4:7); and again, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe

5:8). To resist the devil is to refuse his temptations, to fight against sin; contrariwise, to trifle with temptation and commit sin is to render service unto him.

The forwarding of sin is the devil's main instrument to lead his subjects into more and more of a revolt against their Maker; and the more any yield to his solicitations, the more do they perform his work. To sin is to "give place to the devil" (Eph 4:27); and to depart from Christ is to turn "aside after Satan" (1Ti 5:15). Whenever we knowingly sin, we join with Satan in his battle against God—we take sides with him and strengthen his cause. How that awful consideration should restrain us and make us tread warily! How it should humble us before God when we have yielded to temptation, and thus aided His arch-enemy! Again; the love of God and the love of the world cannot possibly stand together: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). Thus, the lines are plainly drawn: If I be a friend of the world, the abettor of Satan, the servant of sin, I cannot possibly be at peace with God. But if I be reconciled to God, then I am in avowed and open antagonism to that evil trinity.

While any soul be at peace with sin, he is certainly not at peace with God, for He is ineffably holy and hates all sin. It was sin which caused the breach between Him and us: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them" (Isa 63:10). Since sin be the inveterate enemy of God and man, it must be fought, or it will destroy us. Hence, His call is "be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20). When a soul really responds to that call, he ceases his opposition to God and inlists under the banner of Christ. Christ becomes his "captain" (Heb 2:10), and he engages to fight against all His enemies. He severs his old allegiance with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and binds himself by a solemn bond to live unto God and be the Lord's for evermore. Henceforth, there can be no truce between corruptions and grace, carnal reasonings, and the teaching of Holy Writ. "Neither yield ye your members as *instruments* [weapons] of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God" (Rom 6:13).

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, *striving against sin*" (Heb 12:4). The leading thought of the context is the need for faithful perseverance in a time of persecution and suffering. In the urging thereof, the apostle set before them (and us) the grand example of Jesus Christ, and how we should improve the same. Then he points out that severe as had been the trials experienced, yet not so fearful as might yet be encountered. They had indeed suffered considerably (Heb 10:32-33); but so far, God had restrained their enemies from going to extreme lengths. The afflictions already undergone did not discharge them from their warfare; rather, must they continue therein to the point of being prepared to lay down their lives. That warfare consisted of "striving against sin" (Heb 12:4)—sin in themselves, which inclined them to take the line of least resistance; sin in their persecutors, who sought to drive them to apostatize.

In Hebrews 12:4, the apostle continues to use the figure of the Public Games which he had employed in verse 1; only there, he refers to the "race," while here, he alludes to the mortal conflict or combat between gladiators—wherein one contend for his life against another who had entered the lists against him. In like manner, the Christian has to contend with a mortal adversary, namely sin—both external and internal. He is called upon to wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness (Eph 6:12); and therefore, he is exhorted to take unto him, "the whole armour of God" (Eph 6:11, 13). So too he is to strive against his own indwelling corruptions: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which *war* against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). Those lusts are violent and powerful, ever seeking to dominate and regulate the soul, antagonizing the principle of grace, endeavouring to overcome our faith and prevent our obedience to God. Sin is a deadly enemy which will slay us, unless we daily strive against it with determination of mind and resolute effort.

Here then is one of the principal features which distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil. Here is an essential part of the evidence which clearly makes manifest those in whom a miracle of grace has been wrought. Here is the proof that I am reconciled to God. By nature, sin is my element, and I take to it as ducks do to the water and swine to the mire. By nature, I delight in sin: Do I not love myself? And in loving myself, I am delighting in sin, for sin is part and parcel of my being. I was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5). If then I now hate my natural self, loathe sin, vigorously resist it, I must be a new creature in Christ Jesus, at peace with God. If I compare myself with what I was in my unregenerate days, is it not obvious that a radical change has taken place! Did I then abhor myself? No; indeed, far from it. I was pleased with myself. Did I then look upon iniquity as that "abominable thing" (Jer 44:4) which the Holy One hates and take sides with Him against it? Alas, I did not: I thirsted after it, drank greedily of it, and took pleasure therein.

The natural man may indeed seek to overcome some grosser lust, the yielding to which humiliates his pride. He may seriously endeavour to conquer an unruly temper, so that he may not be put to shame before his fellows. But that is a very different matter. One who is truly reconciled to God has voluntarily entered into a covenant to fight

against sin *as sin*, and not merely this or that particular form and outbreaking thereof. He is daily engaged in contending with his indwelling corruptions, resisting the devil, refusing the allurements of the world, mortifying his members which are upon the earth. Here, then, is the matter reduced to its simplest possible terms, here is the plain but sufficient rule by which you may test the validity of your profession. You *know* whether or not you really are fighting against sin. We do not say fighting against it as faithfully, diligently, zealously as you ought to be. Nor do we say meeting with that success which you could wish. It is the *fact* itself we would have you consider: If you are really warring against indwelling sin, you must be one with God.

Probably the reader says, "Tell us more explicitly what you mean by fighting against sin." Very well. Fighting against sin implies that you hate it—for you do not war against anything you love. Likewise, it signifies you earnestly desire to avoid it, keep away from it, have no commerce with it. To countenance sin is rebellion against God; to condemn and oppose sin is conformity to Him. If I hate sin and am engaged in a warfare against it, I shall not trifle with temptation, but watch jealously for and seek to suppress the first motions of sin in my heart. When my corruptions clamour for satisfaction, I shall earnestly endeavour to deny them. When the apostle averred, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1Co 9:27), he was describing one aspect of his fight against sin. When another of the apostles enjoined, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1Jo 5:21), he was calling them unto a further part of the same conflict. It was an affectionate appeal for them to avoid, resist, and renounce will worship and whatever would captivate our affections.

This fighting against sin is *from evangelical motives*. Here, too, the line is clearly drawn between the regenerate and the unregenerate. Whatever resistance the latter makes against sin, it is from carnal or legal considerations. That which deters the natural man from the outward commission of evil is either pride or self-respect, because he would retain the good opinion of his fellows, or the fear of consequences. But different far is it with the spiritual man: He would hate and resist sin, even if assured there is no Hell awaiting evildoers hereafter! It is love of God, a desire to please Him, a concern for His glory, a horror of doing that which would sully his profession, bring shame upon the cause of Christ, or stumble any of His little ones. Hence it is that when Satan gets the better of him, and he is overtaken in a fault, he mourns before God. If we be reconciled to God, we love Him, and repentance is the first expression of that love—the sorrowing part of it. Those fighting against sin do not "allow" or excuse their failures, but grieve over, confess them, and seek to prevent a repetition of the same.

Let us repeat, it is not the measure of our success in this warfare, but the genuineness of our *sincerity* therein, which is the criterion by which we are to measure ourselves. As one of the old worthies said, "This is the seal which assures us the patent is the authentic grant of the Prince of peace." Or as John Owen (1616-1683) put it, "Mortification of sin is the soul's opposition to self, wherein sincerity is most evident." To which we may add, none of our exercises and efforts have *any sincerity* in them—neither reading, hearing, prayer nor worship—unless we are genuinely endeavouring to earnestly and vigorously resist sin. Sin is ever assailing the soul, contending for rule and sovereignty over it. But if a principle of grace be in my heart, then it will constantly *challenge* sin's right to usurp authority and oppose its assaults. "The subduing of our souls to God, the forming of us to a resemblance unto Him, is a more certain sign that we belong to Him, than if we had with Isaiah seen in vision His glory with all His train of angels about Him" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

"Granted," says the exercised soul, "but there is so much in me that is *not* yet subdued to God, yea, which is contrary to Him; and this it is which makes me seriously doubt my reconciliation. I fear that I should be uttering an idle boast and thinking of myself more highly than I ought to, if I declared myself to be engaged in seriously fighting against sin." Dear reader, hypocrites are never troubled over the deceitfulness of their hearts, nor are they concerned at all of being presumptuous; and if *you really are* exercised over such things, then must you not belong to a totally different class! Vain and empty professors are not exercised about their sincerity, but instead, are filled with a self-confidence and sense of security which no expostulations or warnings of man can shake. They are total strangers to the jealous fears and holy exercises of soul, which engage those with humble hearts. "They had rather go to hell on a feather bed than to Heaven in a fiery chariot," as one quaintly but solemnly expressed it.

Am I reconciled to God, at peace with Him? Yes, if I am daily and sincerely engaged in fighting against sin. "But," says the reader, "if I am engaged in such a fight, mine is a *losing* one, for the more I endeavour to resist my corruptions, the more fiercely do they oppose me and thwart my efforts. Yea, so often do my lusts master me, I can only conclude that I am still at war against *God*." Not so, if you take sides *against* your lusts and grieve over their prevalency. As it is not the fighting of a number of individuals belonging to two different countries which causes one of those states to declare war against the other, but rather its consenting to and maintaining them in their hostility; so it is not the rising up of our lusts against our graces which constitutes an act of war against God, but only when we approve of them, consent to, and defend their presumptuous enmity. While we take up and maintain a

constant fight against God's enemies—no matter how often we may be worsted in the conflict—hating and disavowing their outrageous uprisings, the peace between God and us holds.

In the articles on *our reception* of that peace which Christ effected Godwards on behalf of His people, we showed at some length what God requires from the sinner if he is to become a personal partaker of that peace; and every exercised reader should go carefully over those articles again with one particular design before him—to discover whether he or she *has met* those requirements. From the lengthy quotation from Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) in the February issue, it was shown that in preparing us to be reconciled to God, it is necessary that we be convinced we are His *enemies*, and that He accounts us such. Thus, if the reader has never been painfully convicted of his revolt against the Most High, he is in no condition to seek reconciliation unto Him. If I have been made aware that I am a lifelong rebel against Heaven, that all my days have been spent in fighting against God, then I shall be sensible and deeply affected by such a realisation. I shall mourn over my wickedness. I shall “remember thy ways, and be ashamed.” I shall be “confounded” and have not one word to say in my self-defence (Eze 16:61-63).

If the Holy Spirit has awakened me from the sleep of self-security, opened my eyes to see my true character in the sight of God, filled me with horror and contrition over my dreadful enmity against Him, then I shall readily respond to that peremptory call, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts” (Isa 55:7), and cease my hostility against the Lord. At first, it will appear to me that I have sinned beyond the hope of forgiveness, that it is impossible God should ever be reconciled to such a rebel as I now know myself to be, that nought but the everlasting burnings can be the portion of such a wretch. But later, the same gracious Spirit who revealed to me my horrible plight, acquaints me that God has “thoughts of peace” (Jer 29:11) toward those who throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him. But that seems too good to be true; and for a season, the stricken soul finds itself unable to credit the same. To him, it appears that a holy God can do nought but abhor him, that a righteous God must surely exact vengeance upon him, that his doom is irrevocably sealed. Do *you* know anything of such an experience as that?

When God begins a work of grace in a soul, He does not cease when it is but half finished. If He wounds, it is that He may heal; if at first, He drives to despair, later He awakens hope. When the Law has performed its office—of stripping us of our self-righteousness—then we are prepared to listen to the message of the Gospel, which tells of the garments of salvation provided for bankrupts. The glorious evangel of divine grace announces that God is not implacable, but inclinable unto peace, that His wisdom has found a way whereby the requirements of His holiness and the demands of His justice are fully met, so that He can—without sully His honour, yea, to the everlasting glory of His matchless name—show mercy to the very chief of sinners. As the soul begins to give credence to that good news, he is persuaded better things of God than his fears allowed, hope is born within him that even his case is not beyond remedy, and the sweet music is borne to his ears, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and *he will have mercy* upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7).

But it is in Christ, and Christ alone, that the thrice Holy God meets the sinner in pardoning mercy. Christ is the One who met His claims and endured His wrath on the behalf of all who put their trust in Him. Christ is the alone Mediator whereby transgressors can approach unto a reconciled God. It is the Lord Jesus who is “set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25). And therefore, “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). It is in and through Christ that sinners may enter into covenant with God, and by whom He enters into covenant with them, for Christ is the “surety” and “the mediator” of a better covenant (Heb 7:22; 8:6). Christ is the One who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10), and who declares, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). Have you gone unto Him as a desperately-ill person who seeks a physician, or as a drowning man who clutches at a lifebuoy? You either have, or you have not; and it should not be difficult for you to determine. But am I come to Christ in the *right* way? Answer: The only right way is to come as a lost sinner, trusting in His merits.

Have you, then, complied with the terms expressed in Isaiah 55:1-3 (explained in the March article)?—for it is with those doing so, that God makes an everlasting covenant. That is but another way of asking, Have you really embraced the Gospel offer, which is made freely to all who hear it? Have you seriously, thoughtfully, brokenheartedly received Christ as your own personal Lord and Saviour? Have you exercised faith in His mediatorial sacrifice? Your faith may indeed have been so weak that you touched but the hem of His garment, yet if it was *His* garment, that was sufficient. The saving virtue lies not in our faith, but in Christ—faith being simply the empty and leprous hand which lays hold of the great Physician. Every penitent believer may be infallibly assured on the Word

of Him that cannot lie, that his sins were all transferred to his blessed Surety and forever put away by Him; and that he is now made the righteousness of God in Christ (2Co 5:21).

But the honest soul who would “make assurance doubly sure” should go further, and test himself by Psalm 50:5, Isaiah 56:4-6, Jeremiah 50:4-5. There we have described the character of those making a covenant with God and who “taketh hold” of His covenant (Isa 56:6); and it is our wisdom and duty to seriously compare ourselves with those characters and ascertain whether we possess their marks. Have I surrendered to God as my absolute Lord and chosen Him to be my all-sufficient Portion? Have I renounced and relinquished the things which He hates and chosen “the things that please” Him (Isa 56:4)? Have I given myself up to Him wholly to love and serve Him, and that not for a brief season only, but forever? Am I now manifesting the sincerity of my surrender by being concerned for His honour and having respect to His Law? Have the resolutions I formed at my conversion been translated unto actual practice?—not perfectly so, but by genuine effort nevertheless. If so, then I have good reason to believe that I have savingly complied with His call, “be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20).

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE

This piece is taken from volume 4 of “The Gospel Magazine” (1777). It forms part of a letter written by a W. M. to a Christian friend:

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). You ask, Whether the Spirit of God can in any sense be called a spirit of bondage? I freely answer, I think not; no, not in any sound, Scriptural sense at all: for it is quite contrary to His name as the Spirit of promise—the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of liberty—a free Spirit—the Spirit of adoption; as well as contrary to His office, as The Comforter—the Glorifier of Jesus—by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us, and bearing witness to our spirits; of that holy freedom and happy liberty which we have in Him from all kinds of bondage, whether of sin, the law, death, or Satan.

You may be ready to ask, in experience, “May we not in some cases, and on some accounts, find, that the Spirit of God becomes a spirit of bondage?” I humbly presume to say, No, not at all; not in any one instance. But you ask, “What then does the apostle mean when he says, ‘Ye have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear’ (Rom 8:15)? Does he not seem to imply that they had once received the Spirit of God as a Spirit of bondage?” No, I humbly apprehend not. I well know, you here allude to His first convictions of sin, and bringing sinners under what some call a *law work*, whereby they experience a sense of bondage to fear the curses of the law denounced against sin, and upon them as sinners. However needful this may be to the real conversion of the soul to Christ, yet I humbly conceive that even here, the Spirit does not act as a Spirit of bondage. For, even when our Lord speaks of His convicting of sin, He calls Him *the Comforter*: ‘When the Comforter is come, He will convince of sin’ etc. (Joh 16:7). Now the office of a Comforter is surely quite opposite to that of a spirit of bondage to fear. It is great, an awful truth, we are all naturally under bondage to the law, sin, and death. But it is as true that we are naturally dead to any real sense, or proper fear, care, or concern about it, or how to be delivered from it. But when the good, gracious, and condescending Lord, the Spirit is pleased to visit our souls with His quickening power, and enlightening agency, then we see, know, and feel the miserable bondage which we are in and under: we fear the terrors of a broken Law, dread the sword of vindictive justice, tremble under the sense of sin, and are horribly afraid of the stroke of death. But, even here, the Spirit can with no propriety be called the Spirit of bondage.

My friend will remember, when lately we visited your neighbour—in a high fever and a strong delirium, by the blessing of God upon the physician’s skill—was restored to his reason; and then he complained of pains and disorders, which he was, before, insensible of. Now, who shall presume to say, because the physician had been instrumental of restoring him to his right mind and proper sense and feeling, that therefore, he was at all the cause of his patient’s pains and disorders? So the Holy Spirit, when He quickens us and brings us to our right mind, whereby we feel and are sensible of our bondage, is not the spirit of bondage to us, nor the cause of bondage in us; but He testifies of Christ and acts as the Comforter by showing us Christ’s love and salvation and leading our thoughts and hopes to Him. Therefore, when the apostle tells the converted Romans, “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom 8:15), I humbly presume we are to understand that he was speaking of their former, natural state, subject to perpetual dread and slavish tormenting fear of coming short of life and salvation, which they, as

Jews or Gentiles, must forever have done, without Christ and His salvation. But being now brought to believe in Him for justification unto life, they “received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). Now we are delivered from our natural, slavish bondage to sin, Satan, the law and death, and from fear of the wrath of God due to our sins; we look up to Him as our reconciled Father in Jesus, and have, through the faith of Him, the love and cry of children in our hearts to Him.

“But after the Holy Spirit is become a spirit of adoption to any soul, may He not again become a spirit of bondage in the soul?” Mr. Burkitt (1650-1703), your favourite expositor, says, No. He observes, that “God’s Holy Spirit, after He has been once a Spirit of adoption, never again becomes a spirit of bondage to the same soul.” “But may not that same soul be again brought into the spirit of bondage, to fear?” Yes, doubtless, but not by the Spirit of adoption. Ah, my dear friend, here is a turning and important point. O that you and I, and all God’s dear children, studied it more deeply, constantly and attentively!—for then we should not have such miserable, bondage-work in our consciences, as we, too, too often have.

Without the Holy Spirit becoming a Spirit of bondage to any soul, it is only for Him to withdraw His enlightening, comforting witness from the heart; and then we are left to experience the woeful bondage of our own nature, haunted with fears, doubts, and distress. I know the gall and wormwood of this; and, therefore, we ought constantly to deprecate with David, “Take not thy holy spirit from me” (Psa 51:11). Yea, and we ought, my dear friend, ever to attend to the apostle’s advice, “Grieve not the holy Spirit” (Eph 4:30); for if we do—by turning to and seeking righteousness, pardon, peace, justification, the hope of eternal life, or any comfort and satisfaction in any object, in opposition to or besides the blessed *Jesus*, whom the Spirit testifies of, bears witness to, and glorifies with the Word, in the hearts of believers—verily we shall grieve the Holy Spirit, and we shall certainly find the awful difference between enjoying Him as a Spirit of adoption, and being left to the bondage of our own spirits, to fear. For the Holy Spirit is never sent away grieved from our hearts, but He leaves the heart grieved for its folly, and lamenting its conduct. And indeed, my dear friend, this is a genuine evidence of a regenerate soul, that it does mourn and grieve for the absence of the Spirit; and that above all other enjoyments, it prizes His comforting presence. The Lord make us daily more and more watchful and jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.

If I have dropped any thing in these loose, scattered hints, which may elucidate this point and give you satisfaction, I shall rejoice. If I have advanced any thing contrary to your or the sentiments of others, I am open to conviction. I would cautiously avoid all controversy; but above all, I would fear to advance any thing contrary to the Truth as it is in Jesus, and the Analogy of Faith; should anything of this kind have dropped from my pen, God be merciful and pardon a weak, imperfect, miserable sinner, who, in the love of Christ, is your faithful and affectionate friend.

WELCOME TIDINGS

As the darkness deepens, as the love of a rapidly-increasing number grows cold, a ministry which seeks to expose a worthless profession on the one hand, and to promote a closer walking with God on the other, will meet with less and less acceptance. The religious public today seek that which is newsy and racy—an attempt to show that the “scarlet coloured beast” (Rev 17:3) of the Apocalypse symbolises “the Reds,” or some wresting of the Word which makes it foretell the destruction of the earth by atom bombs; in short, *anything* save that which searches the conscience, calls to serious self-examination, or requires the mortifying of our lusts. And much grace is needed to resist the popular appeal and refuse to lower the standard. Nevertheless, God’s order to His servant remains unchanged: “Thou shalt speak *my words* unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear” (Eze 2:7). May the Lord enable us to do so unto the end.

Few indeed desire to hear God’s words today; and we are more fully persuaded than ever that it is nothing short of a *miracle* of divine power and mercy that still gives us a sufficient handful of readers to enable us to continue publishing this little monthly messenger. Each year, interested friends kindly send us in the names of those whom they believe will welcome the “Studies,” and we enter them upon our mailing-list; but it is very rare that we ever hear from any of them, and when we drop them, they do not write us requesting a renewal. It is not to be expected that those who are enamoured by the “movies,” or others who devote their leisure hours listening-in to the “radio,” will have any relish for spiritual food. None, but the ones sincerely endeavouring to walk as “strangers and

pilgrims" (1Pe 2:11) through this wilderness world, will value that which exhorts them to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12); and such have well-nigh vanished from the earth.

The absence of many letters (!) and the tenour of some which are received reflect the sad deterioration of religious conditions. With some, it is the "cares"; with some it is the "riches"; and with others, it is "the pleasures of this life" which are the "thorns" that "choke" the Seed and cause them to "bring no fruit to perfection" (Luk 8:14). Numbers who formerly declared that they greatly enjoyed and were much helped by the "Studies" desire them no longer. Those who could hardly wait for the next issue, and wished it had double the number of pages, now only read an article here and there. But is not this a strange way in which to begin a piece on "Welcome Tidings"? Hardly. The shining of the sun is doubly welcome after days of fog! A cup of water is deeply appreciated by one who is parched. And in a "day of small things" (Zec 4:10), a few encouraging words mean much to those who become discouraged by general indifference—be it preacher or writer. Some of which we now quote:

"I thank our God and Father through the Lord Jesus Christ for light which I have received from the 'Studies.' This gives me more to understand His will to us. It helps me very much in this dark age" (*A Polish Brother*).

"We are especially enjoying the articles on Spiritual Growth and I trust profiting by them. The 'Studies' are all we have precious outside our Bibles, so do hope and pray we may still have them" (*Australia*).

"With deep gratitude, I enclose an M. O. for the Studies. They have reached me so far without loss, and continue to be very searching. I trust you may long be enabled to continue this splendid ministry" (*New Zealand*).

"Glad to say I receive the magazine regularly, for which I thank you. I always look forward to getting them, and appreciate their contents more and more. They are to me like fruit, which becomes more luscious as it nears the fully ripe stage. May God spare you long and bless your efforts in His service. I am enclosing a small donation in fellowship" (*Canada*).

"I appreciate your magazine a great deal, and find in it real meat for the soul. May the Lord continue to bless you in this excellent work" (*Preacher*).

"I cannot express what the 'Studies' have meant to me over the years, and yet more abundantly. Especially have the articles on the Doctrine of Reconciliation been of great benefit and instruction to me. I must confess that I have to go over such several times to make them my own. But I say, 'Thank you, Lord' often when the new light and the old shines unto me" (*U.S.A.*).

"Your magazine grows more and more of a necessary part in my daily devotions. There are so few to which a lay student like myself can have access that are in any measure worth studying; most are so very superficial. I am continually grateful to you for the depth of your articles which, in turn, make my own Scripture reading more serious and deeper."

"It is a pleasure in Him to be able once more to thank you for the faithful arrival of 'Studies' through 1945; and believe me I do enjoy them. I rise one hour earlier each morning so that I can spend it before I go out, which hour is 4:30-5:30a.m.; I would not do without it. That I have done all through the war years. It is really impossible to fully express the great joy it is to study the Word with you, and prayerfully seek to carry out the instruction contained therein" (*Wales*). How that puts to shame the excuses, the idle excuses—for where there's a will, there's a way!—of those who say they have no time available for solid reading-matter! "The soul of the diligent [not the 'dilatatory'] shall be made fat" (Pro 13:4).

"I am very glad to have the Magazine. Although the doctrine you teach is not acceptable to many people, I feel all you write has the Word of God for authority; and other than that, I would not have. May He bless you in your work" (*England*).

"I feel very thankful to God for supplying so much need through you. To me, there is no reading I can get on the Word of God so helpful. We pray that you and Mrs. Pink may long be spared and blest to continue in this ministry" (*Ireland*).

"I wish to thank you indeed for the Studies. It gives me great pleasure to read them, and I trust more than that; indeed, I have to bless the Lord often, and often in my heart, for such reading" (*Scotland*).

"'Studies' have indeed proved a real blessing to my spiritual welfare; and needless to say, I look forward expectantly to their arrival every two months. May it please our gracious Lord to grant you continued strength and wisdom as you labour on for His glory" (*Preacher*).

"Once again, I write to thank you for all your labour in the Lord to provide us with the spiritually-helpful 'Studies.' We do thank God for the truth brought clearly out for our benefit and enrichment" (*Preacher*).

“I am writing to tell you what a tremendous blessing they have been to me, both in their acute analysis of spiritual truth and their warm expression of devotion to our Lord Jesus. I cannot but feel that your written ministry meets a deep and wide need amongst God’s people” (*Preacher*).

THE EARTH

Part 2 (excerpted from Letters of James Hervey, 1714-1758)

So judicious is the arrangement of this grand edifice! So beneficent the destination of its whole furniture, which is all regulated with consummate skill, and touched with the highest perfection! All is most exactly adapted to the various intentions of Providence, and the manifold exigencies of mankind; supplying every want we can feel, and gratifying every wish we can form.

Insomuch that the whole system affords a favourite topic of praise, even to those distinguished beings who “stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Rev 15:2) in their hands. They lift their voices and sing, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints”! (Rev 15:3)—the first part seems to mean what the inspired writer calls, “the song of Moses”; the second contains what he styles, “the song of the Lamb.” The first, I should imagine, relates to the stupendous works of *creation*. The second alludes to the far more wonderful scheme of *redemption*. The former describing the system of nature is recorded by Moses; the latter, comprehending the salvation of the saints, is accomplished by Christ. And is there not reason, infinite reason, for *us* to join this triumphant choir? Adding gratitude to our wonder, and love to our hallelujahs! Since all these things are to us not merely objects of contemplation, but sources of accommodation; not only a majestic spectacle bright with the display of our Creator’s wisdom, but an inestimable gift rich with the emanations of His goodness. The earth hath He *set before* the inhabitants of glory, but the earth hath He *given to* the children of men (Psa 115:16). Having given us ourselves, given us a world, has He not a right, a most unquestionable right, to make that tender demand, “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26)?

Shall I add another passage? Which, viewed with any other but the last paragraph, will be like the head of gold, eminent, and conspicuous on feet of iron and clay. It is taken from the finest philosophical oration that ever was made. I never read it but with a glow of delight and with impressions of awe. It is, in short, inimitably spirited and sublime. Forbear to be delighted, if you can; cease to admire it, if you can; when you hear Omniscience itself declaring that, on sight of this universal fabric, emerging out of nothing, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The system was so graceful, so magnificent, and in all respects, so exquisitely finished, that the most accomplished intelligences were charmed, were transported. They knew not how to express themselves on the great occasion, but in shouts of exultation and songs of delight. Is it possible for imagination to conceive an encomium so just, so high, so beautifully sublime! I am sure that after so much delicacy and majesty of sentiment, any thing of mine must be intolerably flat.

SEPTEMBER

CURIOSITY REBUKED

This short article has been suggested by the nature of the inquiries we often receive from correspondents. We welcome questions of a practical character, which evince a desire for a closer walking with God; but those which

savour of mere intellectual inquisitiveness we disfavour. The Scriptures were not written for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, but to enlighten and direct conscience, to nourish the soul, and to bring our lives into conformity with God's will. The very first chapter of the Bible is sufficient to evidence that. A score of questions might be asked on its opening verses, but it is more than doubtful if any spiritual edification would result, even if satisfactory answers were obtainable. "In the beginning God created" (Gen 1:1) is addressed unto *faith*; and the very terseness of that declaration is an intimation that any prying attempt to go behind it would be presumptuous. No explanations are made, and we must be content with what God has been pleased to reveal, and curb our curiosity.

There is a spirit of inquiry which is legitimate and praiseworthy, and there is one which is to be deprecated. A drowsy indifference is the mark of an indolent mind, but an inquisitiveness which is directed by carnality is vain and profitless. A careful reading of the four Gospels will at once reveal that the Lord Jesus nowhere set a premium on mental inertia, but rather did He ever seek to stimulate the minds of those around Him. How frequently did He ask His hearers questions, and how often did He condescend to answer theirs! Yet it will be found that He never gave the slightest encouragement to idle curiosity, nor did He deign to furnish answers to queries of no practical moment. When He paid any attention to those who asked vain questions, He at once directed their minds unto matters of more pressing importance. In other words, He rebuked an idle curiosity.

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Luk 13:1). Various conjectures have been made by the commentators as to the reason or motive of that statement; and no doubt, there is room for legitimate difference of opinion concerning it. But in the light of what immediately follows, it seems to us that a prying spirit was at least one of the elements which prompted it, that it was tantamount to asking, "Why did such a doom overtake those Galileans? Was it because they had been guilty of some heinous crime and were greater sinners before God than others?" In His answer, the Saviour at once revealed that He read their hearts and knew their secret thoughts, but pressed upon them their responsibility: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luk 13:2-3). Instead of concerning yourselves about the fate of others, look well to *yourselves* and make sure that *you* have that godly sorrow which "worketh repentance to salvation" (2Co 7:10).

Again and again, we find our Lord checking the spirit of presumptuous inquiry. When the Pharisees came unto Him saying, "Master, we would see a sign from thee" (Mat 12:38), and when Herod "hoped to have seen some miracle done by him" (Luk 23:8), He refused to gratify either the one or the other. When one asked Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" we are told that "he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door" (Luk 13:23-25). Look to yourself, instead of speculating about others. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, "Many are most inquisitive respecting who shall be saved, and who not, than respecting what they shall do to be saved." "Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling" (Phi 2:12) is a word which many need to attend unto.

"And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?" (Joh 6:25). That was the language of vain curiosity, its force being, "*How* did you get here?" In the immediate context, it will be seen that on the previous day, Christ had miraculously fed the multitude, after which He departed alone into a mountain, while His disciples entered a ship and crossed over to Capernaum. The people saw there was no other boat there, but later they took shipping and came to Capernaum. When they found Christ there, they were puzzled, wondering *how* He had crossed the sea, and hence, their question. Instead of pandering to their inquisitiveness, the Lord said, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (Joh 6:26-27).

The risen Redeemer announced unto Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following"; and curiosity getting the better of him, he asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?"—or better, "But of this one, what?" "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? *follow thou me*" (Joh 21:18-22). That was manifestly a rebuking of the spirit which had prompted the apostle's inquiry, being the equivalent of saying, "That is none of your affair." Instead of wanting to know what should befall his brother, let him attend to the performance of duty. If he gave due heed to all that was involved in that precept, "follow me," he would have no time to waste upon useless speculations.

On the very eve of Christ's ascension, after bidding the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, they asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Act 1:6). To which He gave the blunt rejoinder, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power," adding, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Act 1:7-8). How prone we are to pry into that which is none of our business. How ready to engage to idle speculations, instead of the more practical things. The Lord had already given those apostles their orders: Let them attend unto the same and not inquire after times and seasons. How pertinent is this incident to our own day! Many now are possessed of a similar spirit, puzzling over what is yet to take place on this earth. The future is in the hands of God, who will assuredly accomplish His eternal purpose. Our concern should be to be endued with the Spirit and to be faithful witnesses for Christ.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

33. Philippians 1:8-11, Part 1 (1:8-9)

It has been well said that, "The prayers of holy men are usually the utmost and choicest expressions of their graces—the drawings forth, or pourings forth rather, of their deepest affections and desires, for things which the light of the Spirit in them judgeth to be most excellent." It must be so, for where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Mat 6:21); and the more spiritual a man becomes, the more is his soul engaged with and enraptured by spiritual things, and the more will experimental and practical holiness be his supreme quest. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34); and when a spiritually-minded person has liberty in prayer, he will necessarily seek both for himself and his fellow-saints an increased measure of grace, that his and their eyes may perceive more clearly the inestimable value of divine things and have their hearts set upon them more constantly, in order that the fruits of righteousness may abound in their lives. Such were the breathings of the apostle on this occasion.

Variety marks all the works of God. Men's intellectual endowments are as unlike each other as their countenances. There are many different types of Christians, though broadly speaking, they may be grouped under two classes—the intelligent or well instructed, and the affectionate. As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out: "There are usually extant those two sorts of Christians: affectionate, fond of souls of Christ, but less knowing; others more knowing, yet less passionate; though true Christians both." The primitive times give instances of both. The Corinthians were "enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1Co 1:5), yet their love was weak and low. This is implied by the contrast pointed between knowledge and love in 1 Corinthians 8:2-3, and is still more plainly intimated where the apostle tells them, "yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (1Co 12:31)—which he proceeded to do in the next chapter, wherein he set forth at length the nature, excellency, and pre-eminence of spiritual love. The fearful imprecation of 1 Corinthians 16:22—found nowhere else in the New Testament—also illustrates this solemn feature of the Corinthians.

In sharp contrast from the Corinthians, the Philippian saints were a more plain and less gifted order of Christians. They were warmly devoted to Christ and His people, but they had an inadequate understanding of His mind. Their affections exceeded their knowledge—as is the case with a few simple but sincere and ardent Christians today. Generally, and markedly so in Christendom now, those with more light in their heads than love in their hearts have greatly outnumbered the others. Now Paul was far from despising or disparaging the case of the Philippian saints, but he longed for a better balance in their characters, and therefore, he prayed (not as most of *us* need to—that our love may increase in proportion to our light, but) that their intelligence might be commensurate with their affections; that their "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9); that both might grow up and develop together; and that they be well-proportioned Christians. Thereby, would they more fully conform unto God who is both "light" (1Jo 1:5) and "love" (1Jo 4:8).

The prayer we are now to be occupied with admits of a simple analysis. We have, first, its *spring*: "How greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:8). It was the fervent affection which the apostle had for these brethren that prompted his supplication on their behalf: The measure of our love for others can largely be determined by the frequency and earnestness of our prayers for them! Second, its *petition*, namely, that their "love

may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9): That was the “one thing” (Psa 27:4) he “desired” on their behalf, the comprehensive blessing which he requested for them. What follows in verses 10-11, we do not regard as additional petitions, but rather as the effects which would result from the granting of his single petition. Thus, we view the contents of verses 10-11 as third, its *reasons*. Grant, Lord, that their love may be more fully informed and directed by heavenly knowledge and wisdom, “that [Revised Version, “so that”] ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Jesus Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:10-11).

First, *its spring*. “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:8). This was a solemn appeal unto the Searcher of hearts of the reality and intensity of his love for them—whether *they* knew or realised it or not, *God* did. Having them in his heart, he longed for their spiritual welfare. He not only longed after them, but “after you all”; and that, with intense affection and good will. And that, “in the bowels [or “compassions”] of Jesus Christ”—with the Hebrews, the “bowels” were regarded as the seat of affections and sympathy, as the “heart” is with us. This expression, “the compassion of Jesus Christ” is susceptible of a twofold meaning. First, as referring to the personal love which the Redeemer Himself bears unto the redeemed; second, causally, as that tender compassion for His saints which Christ had infused in the heart of His servant. Paul regarded them with something of the tenderness which the Lord Jesus had for them. This was the warmest and strongest expression which he could find to denote the ardour of his attachment.

If then Christ had infused such love in the heart of His servant unto these saints, what must that be in its fulness for them in the heart of Christ: If such be the stream, what the Fountain! What a marvellous change had been produced in the apostle! Most probably, it is that which the Holy Spirit here moved him to emphasise in contrasting the transformation which grace had produced in him from what he was in former days. As Saul of Tarsus, how ferocious and cruel he had been unto the followers of Christ—what havoc he wrought among them by his threatenings and persecutions! What had changed the lion to the lamb? Who had made him so tender and considerate, so solicitous of the welfare of the Philippians? Who had given him such affection for them? The Lord Jesus. “Through the tender mercy of our God” (Luk 1:78) is literally, “the bowels of the mercy of our God.” And cannot each Christian reader—to some extent at least—join with the apostle in calling God as witness of the blessed change which His grace has wrought in him; so that from being self-centered and ice-cold to God’s people, his heart is now compassionate and warm to them, yearning to promote their welfare!

Second, *its petition*. “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9), or “sense.” Paul not only prayed for these saints, but he acquaints them with the particular things he requested for them, so that they might know what they should ask for and earnestly strive after. In like manner, his prayer is placed on permanent record in the Word that saints in all generations might be similarly instructed. If we would ascertain that they are our special spiritual needs, if we would be better informed of the specific things we most require to ask for, then we should pay more than ordinary attention to these prayers of the apostles—fixing them in our minds, meditating frequently upon them, begging God to open unto us their spiritual meaning, and to effectually impress our hearts with the same. There is nothing provincial or evanescent about these prayers, for they are suited unto and designed for Christians of all ages, places, and cases. There is a wealth of heavenly treasure in them, which no expositor can exhaust, and which the Holy Spirit will reveal unto humble, earnest, seeking souls. At most, we can but seek to interest the reader in them and attempt to indicate their principal bearings.

Those saints already loved God and His Christ, His Cause, and His people, yet the apostle prayed it might, “abound yet more and more” (Phi 1:9), which illustrates what we pointed out in a previous article. The more we discern the grace of God at work in an individual Christian or church, the greater encouragement have we to make request that a still larger measure of it may be communicated to him or them. T. Goodwin pointed out that the Greek word here used for “abound” is a metaphor taken from the bubbling up and flowing of a spring of water, and showed the force and appropriateness of it. A spring flows naturally and spontaneously, and not by the mechanical efforts of men. Such is divine love in the soul: It operates freely and not by constraint, it works readily, and requires no urging from without. Where Christ is known to the soul, the heart cannot but be drawn out unto Him and delight in Him. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves *are taught* of God to love one another” (1Th 4:9). No one can be made to love one another, but where there is love, it will act freely and readily.

“In a fountain, as you take away, still more comes, and the faster it comes; and thus as a spring retains not its water to itself, so love keeps nothing to itself, but it flows to the use and benefit of God and men.” Love is selfless: Its very nature is to give, seeking to promote the glory of God and the good of our fellows. “Again, as fountains

have their rise in hills, so this of love is first in God's heart in heaven: 'We love him, because he first loved us' (1Jo 4:19)." As the Psalmist declared, "all my springs [of holiness and comfort] are in thee" (Psa 87:7)—my life, my light, my love, my faith, and all my graces originate from Thee. To the "that your love may abound" (Phi 1:9)—or spring up and flow forth—the apostle added, "yet more and more." God can ever have enough of our love, nor us of His grace. "Seeth thou a spark of fire, lay straw to it, and then add more fuel, and it 'abounds more and more' according to its fuel. Such a thing is grace and love: all the excellencies in God are ordained to be the object, the fuel of it, yet it can neither consume nor be consumed, but abounds still more and more" (T. Goodwin). Thus, if we would receive an enlargement of love, we must be more and more engaged with its Object.

"That your love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge*" (Phi 1:9) As the understanding needs to be enlightened and the conscience informed, so love requires *instructing*. There is a necessary connection between knowledge and love—both for its inception, continuance, and development. A person must be known by us before we can love him. Christ must become a living reality before the heart is drawn out unto Him. There must be a personal and spiritual acquaintance with divine things before they can be delighted in. Where God is truly known, He is necessarily adored. And as has been pointed out in the last paragraph, if our love for Him is to increase, then we must be more occupied and absorbed with His perfections. But love not only needs to be fed and nourished, it also requires to be taught, if it is to act intelligently. Spiritual love should not act by blind impulse, but be Scripturally-regulated. The Jews had "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom 10:2). They sincerely believed they were serving God when they excluded Christians from their synagogues, and later killed them because they supposed those Christians were heretics (Joh 16:2); yet they erred grievously therein—and their case has been recorded as a solemn warning for us.

It is painful to witness sincere and affectionate believers making mischievous mistakes and falling into wrong courses through lack of light, yet there are many such cases. An ill-instructed and injudicious Christian causes much trouble among his brethren, and often increases the reproaches of the world. That for which Paul here prayed was an intelligent affection in the saints, that a warmheartedness should be based upon and flow from an enlarged perception of divine things, that they might have a clear apprehension of the just claims of God and of their brethren and sisters in Christ. The world says that 'love is blind,' but the love of the Christian should be an enlightened one, well-instructed and directed in all its exercises, effects, and manifestations, by the Scriptures. Unless love be regulated by an enlarged and exact knowledge of the Word, and by that good judgment which is the result of matured discernment and experience, it soon degenerates into fanaticism and ill-advised exertions. An affectionate regard for our brethren is to be far more than a mere sentiment, namely, "love in the truth" (2Jo 1)—love informed and controlled by the Truth.

If there be some Christians who have a good understanding of the Truth, yet are considerably carnal in their walk (1Co 3:1-3), there are others who though defective in knowledge and unsettled in the Faith, yet are warm hearted, having much zeal toward God and His cause, and have a considerable command over their passions. Now God's people should labour for *both*: "For a good heart, well headed, and a head well hearted" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). It was love and zeal for Christ which prompted the apostles to say, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Luk 9:54) when they saw how their Master was slighted; yet it had been a misdirected love and zeal, as His "ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luk 9:55) showed. Love, then, must be *instructed* if it is to be placed upon its legitimate objects, and restrained from non-permissible ones if it is to be rightly exercised on all occasions; and only from God's Word can the needed instruction be obtained. Only as love is regulated by light—and light is accompanied by and infused with love—are we well balanced.

"That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all *judgment*" (Phi 1:9). Something more than bare knowledge—even though it be a knowledge of the Word—is needed if love is to be duly regulated and exercised: That something is here termed, "judgment," or in the margin, "sense." The facts concerning that word are as follows: In the singular number, it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and only once (Heb 5:14) in its plural form, where it is rendered, "senses." In Young's Analytical Concordance, it is defined as "perception, sense, intelligence." The Revised Version has "discretion," and Bagster's Interlinear has "intelligence." But T. Goodwin—for whom we have a very high regard both as a theologian and expositor, and who was a scholar of the first rank—decidedly favours "sense." Following our usual custom, we shall take in both meanings. Not only do we need to be thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, but if we are to make proper use of such knowledge, then *good judgment* is required in the governing of our affections and the ordering of our affairs.

Many are wise in the general principles and in the letter of the Word, but err grievously in the applying of those principles in detail. There is a vast variety of circumstances in our lives which call for much prudence in dealing

with them aright. If our hearts are to be properly governed and our ways suitably ordered, much instruction and experience is required. Besides a knowledge of God's will, the spirit of discretion is needed. There are times when all lawful things are not expedient, and wisdom is indispensable to determine when those times and where those places are, as well as by which persons they may be used or performed. Much indiscretion and folly remain in the best of us. The chief work of our "judgment" is to perceive what becometh the time, the place, the company where we are, that we may order our behaviour aright (Psa 50:23), that we may know how to conduct ourselves in all relations civil and sacred, in work or in recreation; how to conduct ourselves as husbands, fathers, wives, or children, as employers or employees; to know what is good, what is better, and what is best in all situations.

"There is much wisdom and prudence needed to know how to converse profitably and Christianly with all that we have to do. That we judge what is due the Creator, and what is allowed the creature. That we may know how to pay reverence to superiors, how profitably to converse with equals, what compassion to inferiors, how to do them good. Wisdom maketh us profitable in our relations: 'Husbands, dwell with them [your wives] according to knowledge' (1Pe 3:7). In short, how to love our friends in God, and our enemies for God; how to converse secretly with God, and how to walk openly before men, how to cherish the flesh that it may not be unserviceable, yet how to mortify it that it may not wax wanton against the spirit; how to do all things in the fear of God in meats and drinks, apparel, and recreations; when to speak and when to hold our peace, when to praise and when to reprove; how to give and how to take, when to scatter and when to withhold" (T. Manton on Psalm 119:66). In its exercises and expressions, love needs to be directed by a good judgment.

"That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in all judgment*" (Phi 1:9). It should be duly noted that this is where the emphasis is placed: "In *all* sense," to denote this is of the greatest importance—such "knowledge" as has sense added to or joined with it. With his painstaking thoroughness, T. Goodwin showed that this term has a threefold force. First, as added to "knowledge," the two words signify the same as the term, *faith*. What is faith but a spiritual perception of divine things? The soul has its "senses," as well as the body; and as God has placed in our bodies senses suited to the material objects we come into contact with in this outer world—faculties which enable us to cognise them—so when the soul is renewed at regeneration, we receive that which is suited to the objects of the spiritual realm, which capacitates us to cognise and enjoy the same. Faith is metaphorically expressed by each of the bodily senses: "O *taste* and *see* that the LORD is good," which is explained in the next clause, "blessed is the man that *trusteth* in him" (Psa 34:8). To actually partake of God's goodness, to perceive in our hearts His excellency, are the acts of faith.

"He that hath an *ear*, let him hear" (Rev 2:7). Those born again have an inward ear, such as the natural man possesses not (Deu 29:3-4). Said the Lord Jesus, "The sheep follow him: for they *know* his voice" (Joh 10:4)—that is, they discern and distinguish His voice by an inward instinct or sense, for it is at once added, "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him" (Joh 10:5). So with *smelling*: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: [So to men] To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life" (2Co 2:15-16). There he likens the effects of the ministry to that of vapours or smells. As there are some (like gases in the mines) which suffocate and kill, such is the effect of the Gospel upon the reprobate; and as there are scents (like smelling salts) which revive the fainting, such the Gospel is made unto the elect. So too our sense of touch, "which...our hands have *handled*, of the Word of life" (1Jo 1:1)—all referring to acts of *faith*.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

13. Rahab (2:8-13)

Mark the contrast: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not" (Heb 11:31). And why? Because a sovereign God had made her to differ from them (1Co 4:7). She was blessed with "the faith of the operation of God" (Col 2:12). Consequently, she "heard" of the works of the Lord not merely with the outward ear, as was the case with all her fellow-citizens, but with the ear of the heart; and therefore, was she affected by those tidings in a very different manner from what they were who heard but "believed not." It is clear from her words, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land" (Jos 2:9) that she had both heard and believed the promises which

He had made to Abraham and his seed; and perceiving He was a gracious and giving God, hope had been born in her. Behold then the distinguishing favour of God unto this vessel of mercy, and realise that something more than listening to the Gospel is needed to beget faith in us. "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Pro 20:12). Only those "who hath believed" the "report...to whom is the arm [power] of the LORD revealed" (Isa 53:1). As later with Lydia, so Rahab was one "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Act 16:14).

Solemn indeed is the warning pointed by the unbelieving fellows of Rahab. So far as we are informed, they heard precisely the same report as she did. Nor did they treat those tidings with either scepticism or contempt; instead, they were deeply affected by them, being terror-stricken. The news of God's judgments upon the Egyptians, and their nearer neighbours, the Amorites, made their hearts melt, as they feared it would be their turn next. If it be asked, "Why did they not immediately and earnestly cry unto God for mercy?" the answer—in part, at least—is supplied by Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Space was given for repentance, but they repented not. A further respite was granted during the six days that the hosts of Israel marched around Jericho, but when nothing happened and those hosts returned to their camp, its inhabitants continued to harden their hearts. Thus it is with the majority of our fellows today, even of those who are temporarily alarmed under the faithful ministry of God's servants.

The workings of natural fear and the stirrings of an uneasy conscience soon subside; having no spiritual root, they endure not. Only one in all that city was divinely impressed by the account which had been received of the Lord's work in overthrowing the wicked. Ah, my reader, God's sheep have ever been few in number, though usually a great many goats have mingled with them, so that at a distance and to a superficial survey, it seems as though the flock is of a considerable size. Not only few in number, but frequently isolated from each other, one here and one there, for the children of God are "scattered abroad" (Joh 11:52). The experience of David was very far from being a unique one when he exclaimed, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psa 102:6-7). God's thoughts and ways are not as ours, being infinitely wiser and better, though only the anointed eye can perceive that. Not only is His keeping power more strikingly displayed, and glorified by preserving a lone sheep in the midst of goats and wolves, but that solitary believer is cast back the more upon Him.

It is this very *loneliness* of the saint which serves to make manifest the genuineness of his faith. There is nothing remarkable in one believing what all his associates believe, but to have faith when surrounded by sceptics is something noteworthy. To stand alone, to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause, when all others are federated unto evil, is a rare sight. Yet such was Rahab. There were none in Jericho with whom she could have fellowship, none there to encourage her heart and strengthen her hands by their godly counsel and example: All the more opportunity for her to prove the sufficiency of divine grace! Scan slowly the list presented in Hebrews 11, and then recall the recorded circumstances of each. With whom did Abel, Enoch, Noah have spiritual communion? From what brethren did Joseph, Moses, Gideon receive any help along the way? Who were the ones who encouraged and emboldened Elijah, Daniel, Nehemiah? Then think it not strange that you are called to walk almost if not entirely alone, that you meet with scarcely any like-minded or any who are capable of giving you a lift along the road.

During the past six years, this magazine was sent to quite a number in the different fighting forces, and without a single exception, they informed us that they were circumstanced similarly to Rahab. Some were with the British, some with the Colonials, some with the Americans; some were in the Navy; others in the Army and Air Force; but one and all reported the same thing—totally cut off from contact with fellow-Christians. The "Studies" were sent to and deeply appreciated by men in both the Royal and the Merchant Navies; but in each instance, they were on different ships, surrounded by the ungodly. How easily the Lord could have gathered them together on to one ship! But He did not. And it was for their *good* that He did not; otherwise, He had ordered things differently (Rom 8:28). Faith must be tried, to prove its worth. Nor is it a hothouse plant, which wilts and withers at the first touch of frost. No, it is hardy and sturdy; and so far from winds and rain dashing it to pieces, they are but occasions for it to become more deeply rooted and vigorous.

The isolation of Rahab appears in that utterance of her's, "I know...that your terror is fallen upon *us*" (Jos 2:9). They were but naturally and temporarily affected; she, spiritually and permanently so. What she heard came to her soul with divine power. And again, we say it was God who made her to differ. By nature, her heart was no different from that of her companions; but having been supernaturally quickened into newness of life, she received "with meekness the engrafted word" (Jam 1:21). "All men have not faith" (2Th 3:2), because all are not born again. Faith is one of the attributes and activities of that spiritual life (or nature), which is communicated at regeneration. The firm foundation for faith to rest upon is the sure Word of God, and divine testimony. By it alone is faith supported

and established. Frames and feelings have nothing whatever to do with it, nor is spiritual confidence either begotten or nourished by them. Assurance comes from implicitly receiving the Word into the heart and relying upon it. Such was the case with Rahab: “I *know* that the LORD hath given you the land...*For* we have *heard* how the LORD” (Jos 2:9-10), etc. She received those tidings, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1Th 2:13). Have you done so, my reader?

Observe well how definite and confident was her language. There was no “if” or “perhaps,” no dubious “I hope”; but instead, a sure and positive, “I know.” That was the knowledge of a saving faith. It is true that faith and assurance may be distinguished, yet they can no more be separated than can faith and obedience. Faith without works is dead, and faith without assurance is something of which this writer can find no mention in Scripture. We refer, of course, to a *saving* faith. What is that faith? It is taking God at His Word, appropriating it unto myself, personally resting upon the testimony of Him who cannot lie. Now I either am doing so, or I am not. If I am, then I must be conscious of so doing, for I cannot possibly be trusting in God and relying on His promise and yet be unaware that I am so doing. Read through the New Testament epistles, and nowhere is there a single passage addressed to saints who questioned their acceptance by God; but everywhere, the language is “we *know*” (2Co 5:1, Gal 4:9, Eph 6:9, Phi 1:6, Col 3:24, 1Th 1:4, 1Pe 1:18-19).

Rahab’s faith was not only accompanied with confidence, but it regulated her actions. The faith of God’s elect is a living, energetic principle, which “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6) and produces fruit to the glory of God. Therein, it differs radically from that nominal and inoperative faith of frothy professors, which goes no deeper than a mere mental assent to the Gospel, and ends in fair but empty words. That faith which is unaccompanied by an obedient walk and abounds not in good works is “dead, being alone” (Jam 2:17). Far different was the faith of Rahab. Of her we read, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (Jam 2:25). This does not mean that her good works was the meritorious ground of her acceptance with God, but that they were the evidence before men that a spiritual principle had been communicated to her, the fruits of which vindicated and approved her profession, demonstrating that she was a member of the household of faith. “Had she said, ‘I believe God is your’s and Canaan is your’s, but I dare not show you any kindness,’ her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her...Those only are true believers that can find in their hearts to venture for God, and take His people for their people, and cast in their lot among them” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

That is something which needs to be constantly insisted upon in this day of empty profession. A faith which does not issue in conversion is not a saving one; and conversion is a radical change of conduct, a right-about face, a reversal of our former manner of life. Saving faith necessarily involves the relinquishing of what previously occupied the heart, the repudiation of what formerly was trusted in, the abandonment of all that is opposed to the thrice holy God. It therefore involves the denying of self and the forsaking of old companions. It was thus with Abram, who was required to leave his old situation in Ur of Chaldea and follow the call of God. It was thus with Moses, who “refused to be called [any longer] 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; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb 11:24-26). It was thus with Ruth, who—in sharp contrast from Orpah—went “back unto her people, and unto her gods,” refusing to forsake Naomi, averring, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:15-16). And it was thus with Rahab. A faith which does not relinquish anything and produce a break from former associations is worth nothing.

Yes, Rahab’s faith was a *self-denying* one; and nothing short of that is what the Gospel requires from all to whom it is addressed. Said the Lord Jesus, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mar 8:34); and again, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:27). Ah, dear friend, you may profess to “believe John 3:16”; but suffer us to ask, Do you also, do you really, *believe* Luke 14:27? Be honest with yourself: Does your daily walk supply *proof* you do so? The self-denying faith of Rahab appeared in her preferring the will of God to the safety of her country, and in sheltering those two spies before the pleasing of her fellow-citizens. Still more conspicuously did it appear in the venturing of her own life, rather than betray the messengers of Joshua, who were the worshippers of the true God. Her faith in God and love for His people made her scorn whatever scoffs she might be subject to and the dangers threatening her. A saving faith is ready whenever God shall call upon us to part with everything which we hold near and dear in this world. Acts of self-denying obedience are the best and surest evidence of a real spiritual faith.

From the standpoint of natural and temporal considerations, Rahab’s faith cost her something. It induced her “to renounce all her interests among the devoted Canaanites (i.e. doomed to destruction), to venture her life and expose herself to the imminent danger of the most cruel tortures in expressing her love for the people of God”

(Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). Such is the wonder-working power of the Spirit in a human soul, producing that which is contrary to fallen human nature, causing it to act from new principles and motives, making it to prefer sufferings for Christ's sake and to endure afflictions by throwing in its lot with His people, than to pursue any longer the vanities of this world. Such was the transformation wrought in Saul of Tarsus, who not only bore with fortitude the persecutions which faith in Christ entailed, but rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer for His sake. Such too has been the blessed fruit borne by the faith of many a converted Jew since then, and many a Gentile, too—especially those in Papish and heathen countries, as the missionary-records abundantly testify. And such in some measure is the case with every converted soul.

In receiving “the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31) Rahab made it manifest that she had a heart for the people of God, and was ready to do everything in her power to assist them. That brief clause summarises all that is revealed in Joshua 2 of her kindly conduct toward the two Israelites. She welcomed them into her home, engaged them in spiritual conversation, made provision for their safety, and refused to betray them. “Her whole conduct manifested a reverential fear of the Lord, an entire belief of His Word, a desire and hope of His favour, an affection for His people, and a disposition to forsake, venture and suffer anything in His cause” (T. Scott). We believe there is a latent reference to her kindness (as well as Abram's) in Hebrews 13, for the word translated “messengers” in James 2:25 is the one rendered “angels” in Hebrews 13:1-3: “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Alas, that so many today instead of so doing, are almost ready to rend each other to pieces over every difference of opinion.

Yet, as we saw in our last, Rahab's faith—like ours—was not free from defect, for her falsehoods proceeded from one who failed to trust God fully. This illustrates, in a general way, the humbling fact that in our best performances, there is a mingling of frailty and folly. But let it be pointed out that in this matter, her conduct is far from being recorded as an excuse for us to shelter behind. Rather, it is chronicled as a solemn warning, and also to teach us that faith in its beginnings has many blemishes. God bears with much weakness, especially in the lambs of His flock. Those who have faith do not always act faith, but there is often much of the flesh mixed with that which is of the Spirit. Very different is *our* case and situation from that of this young convert from heathendom. Rightly did the editor of M. Henry's Old Testament commentary point out, “Her views of the Law must have been exceedingly dim and contracted: a similar falsehood told by those who enjoy the light of Revelation, however laudable the motive, would of course deserve much heavier censure.”

“And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you...for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Jos 2:9, 11). Here we find her making an open avowal of that which the Holy Spirit had secretly wrought in her heart. She acknowledged Jehovah to be the true God, that Israel was the people whom He had loved and owned, and hoped for a place among them. Nothing less is required from the believing sinner today: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:9). The Lord will not own any cowardly and secret disciples. “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 10:32-33). Joseph was not ashamed to confess his God in Egypt, nor Daniel in Babylon; and when Paul stood forth in the midst of the idolatrous crew and soldiers on the ship and told of the reassuring message he had received from the angel of God, he added, “whose I am, and whom I serve” (Act 27:23). Then, no matter where we be, let us not be afraid to show our colours and make known whose banner we serve under.

“Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death” (Jos 2:12-13). Some contracted hearts, in which the very milk of human kindness appears to have congealed, would regard this request of Rahab's as highly presumptuous. Personally, we believe that her soul was so overflowing with gratitude unto the Lord for having saved such an abandoned wretch, that her faith now perceived something of the infinitude of the divine mercy, and believed that such a God would be willing to show grace to the whole of her family. Nor was she disappointed. Moreover, as M. Henry rightly pointed out, “Those who show mercy may expect to receive mercy.” Thus God promised Ebedmelech, in recompense for his kindness to the prophet, that in the worst of times, his “life shall be for a prey” (Jer 39:18).

That this request of Rahab's was something more than an expression of the tenderness of nature is evident from the whole of its tenour. That it was the language of faith appears from her assurance, that without any doubt, Ca-

naan was going to fall before Israel. Her “swear unto me by the LORD” (Jos 2:12) indicates the intelligence of her faith—a solemn oath would clinch the matter. In asking for a “true token,” she made request for some pledge of deliverance: The word occurs first in Genesis 9:12, where God announced that the rainbow would be “the token of the covenant.” In supplicating for the deliverance of her whole family, she left us an example which we may well follow. It is right that we *should* desire God to show mercy unto those who are near and dear unto us. Not to do so would show we were lacking in natural affection. It only becomes wrong when we ignore God’s sovereignty and dictate instead of supplicate. It is blessed to observe that He who has said, “According to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29), responded to Rahab’s faith!

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11c. Its Criteria

Another criterion by which each of us should carefully measure himself is, Am I now a *friend* of God? That is a most pertinent and necessary inquiry, for, as was shown under a considerable variety of expressions when defining the meaning of reconciliation, that term signifies the bringing together of two persons who have previously been alienated, the changing of a state of enmity and hostility unto one of amity and friendship. By nature and by practice, I was the enemy of God, hating and opposing Him; but if a work of grace has been wrought in my soul, then I am now the friend of God, loving and serving Him. As this is a matter of deepest importance—both practically and experimentally—we propose to canvass it in some detail, endeavouring to do so along lines so clear and simple that no exercised soul should have any uncertainty in determining to which class he belongs.

“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the *Friend* of God” (Jam 2:23). It seems passing strange that scarcely any of the commentators perceived the force of that last clause, interpreting it quite out of harmony with its setting. Most of them see in God’s styling Abraham His “friend” an amazing instance of His sovereign grace and condescension, while a few regard the expression in the light of the extraordinary and intimate communion, which the patriarch was permitted to enjoy with Jehovah. But what is there in the context which paves the way for any such climax? It was in nowise the design of the Holy Spirit in this epistle to portray the wondrous riches of divine grace, nor to describe the inestimable privileges they confer upon their recipients; rather was it to expose a worthless profession and supply marks of a valid one. James was not moved to refute the legality of Judaism, which insisted that we must do certain things in order to our acceptance by God, but was repelling Antinomianism, showing the worthlessness of a faith which bore no fruit.

In the days of the apostles, as in all succeeding generations, there were those bearing the name of Christians who supposed that a mere intellectual belief of the Gospel was sufficient to secure a passport for Heaven. There is not a little in the New Testament which was expressly written to refute that error, by an insistence upon holiness of heart and strictness of life being necessary in order to evince a saving faith in Christ. The principal design of James was to show that when God justifies or reconciles a sinner to Himself, He also works in that person a disposition which is friendly toward Him, a spirit and attitude which reciprocates His own benignity. In a genuine conversion, an enemy is transformed into a friend to God, so that he loves Him, delights in Him, and serves Him. No one has any right to regard himself as a friend of God, unless he has the character of one and conducts himself accordingly. If I be the friend of God, then I shall be jealous of His honour, respect His will, value His interests, and devote myself to promoting the same; in a word, I shall shew myself friendly (Pro 18:24).

The apostle’s scope is clear enough both from what immediately precedes and follows. In James 2:20, he says, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” and in verse 24, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” A bare mental assent to the Gospel is worthless, for it affects no change in the heart and walk of the one exercising it. Fair words on the lips are downright hypocrisy, unless they be borne out in our daily conduct. A faith in Christ which conforms not to His image is not the faith of God’s elect. Saving faith produces good works. In verses 8 to 14, the apostle had insisted that the Gospel requires a sincere respect unto all the divine commandments, while in verses 15-25, he shows what a real faith therein brings forth. This he illustrates first by the illustrious case of Abraham. It is to be duly noted that reference is not here made to the

initial act of his faith when the Lord first appeared unto the patriarch in Ur of Chaldea, but rather to that memorable incident on mount Moriah recorded in Genesis 22.

Faith is not a passive thing, but an active principle, operating powerfully within its possessor. “Faith worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). Let those words be carefully pondered. “Faith *worketh*”: It is the very nature of it to do so, for it is a new, living, and powerful energy, imparted to the soul at regeneration. “Faith which worketh by love”—not by fear or compulsion, but freely and gladly. Such was the faith of Abraham: His faith “*wrought* with his works” (Jam 2:22); and it was wrought by love, for it was love to God which moved the patriarch, in obedience to His behest, to lay his dear Isaac upon the altar; and thereby, he attested his friendship to God. “Friendship is the strength of love, and the highest improvement of it. ‘Thy friend’ says Moses, ‘which is as thine own soul’ (Deu 13:6). Friendship is common to and included in all relations of love. A brother is (or ought to be) a friend; it is but friendship natural. Husband and wife are friends—that knot is friendship conjugal. In Song of Solomon 5, we have an instance of both: Christ called His church Sister, and then Spouse; and not contented with both, though put together, He added another compellation as the top of all, ‘O *friends*’ (Song 5:1).”

In its first working, faith comes to God as an empty-handed beggar to receive from Him; yet if it be a sincere and spiritual faith, it will necessarily form the soul of its possessor unto a correspondent and answerable frame of heart unto God; thus, if I come to Him for pardon and peace, and receive the same, the reflex or consequence will be the exercise of a filial and friendly spirit in me toward God. Faith is made the grateful recipient of all from God; yet on that very account, it becomes the worker of love in the soul. In James 2:21-23, the apostle shows what a powerful working thing faith is: It moulded Abraham’s heart into friendship with God. A friend is best known or most clearly manifested in a time of *trial*. Thus it was in Genesis 22: The Lord there put Abraham to the proof, bidding him, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest...and offer him there for a burnt offering.” And God so approved of his ready response as to henceforth own him as His “friend”—see 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8; and since He only calls things as they actually *are*, Abraham had truly conducted himself as such.

Let it next be pointed out that Abraham’s case is not to be regarded as an exceptional or extraordinary one, but rather as a representative and typical one. As Romans 4:11 and 16 plainly teaches, Abraham is a pattern and father unto all believers. Those who are his spiritual children (Rom 9:7-8) and seed (Gal 3:7, 29) “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Rom 4:12) and “do the works of Abraham” (Joh 8:39), and they too are owned by the Lord as His “friends” (Joh 15:14). Observe that in both 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8, it is “the seed of Abraham thy friend,” while in James 2:21, Abraham is expressly presented in that passage as “our father.” Thus, this blessed appellation pertains to all his spiritual seed. For one to be owned by God as His “friend” imports that person has a friendly disposition of heart and deportment of life toward Him, as one friend bears unto another. Wherever a saving faith exists, it frames the heart of its possessor into a friend-like temper and brings forth a friend-like carriage in our life.

“He was called the Friend of God” (Jam 2:23). While that indeed be a title of unspeakable dignity and honour, yet—though scarcely any appear to have perceived it—it is also (and chiefly) expressive of the *inward disposition* of a saint toward God, describing his love for Him and his bearing toward Him. By our carriage and conduct, we exemplify and ratify that character. The faith which justifies a sinner before God is one that worketh by love and is expressed in an obedient walk, earnestly endeavouring to please God in all things; and therefore, the character and carriage of a Christian is appropriately expressed under the notion of *friendship*. In a truly marvellous way had God befriended Abraham, and the patriarch manifested his appreciation by conducting himself suitably thereto. It is the law of friendship to answer it again with friendship: “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24); and to *Him* we must show ourselves supremely friendly, doing nothing to displease or dishonour Him, but exercising subjection to Him, delighting in Him, and promoting His interests.

We will pass now from the general to the particular and consider some of the more obvious characteristics and marks of friendship, together with the duties and offices to be performed, as are proper and suited to such a relationship—friendship, too, combines both privilege and duty, and we should be dishonest if we confined our remarks to one of them only. First of all, then, between two friends, there necessarily exists a *close bond of union*, a oneness of nature, or at least similarly of disposition, so that they share in common the same likes and dislikes—not perhaps in every detail, but generally and essentially so. There can be no congeniality where there is no singleness and harmony of nature. It is the gift and dwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Christian which is the bond of union, and which capacitates him to hate what God hates and love what He loves. It is that oneness of nature and disposition which causes two persons to have a mutual regard and affection, and to look favourably on one another, in

which the very essence of friendship consists. From all eternity, God set His heart upon him, and now the reconciled one has given his heart to Him.

One has a very *high regard* for an intimate and proved friend. That God greatly values and esteems those whom He reconciles to Himself is clear both from His declarations concerning them and what He has done for them. He prizes them above the world and orders all things in its governance for the furthering of their good. “For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee” (Isa 43:3-4). What a wondrous and blessed testimony is that! “He delivered me, because he delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20). “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!” (Song 7:6) is His language respecting His Spouse; and She in return declares, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3). So highly does the saint prize God in Christ that he avers, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25).

Since real and warm friends highly value and delight in one another, it is their chief pleasure to *share each other's company*, being happiest when together. Thus it is between the reconciled soul and his heavenly Friend: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3). In nothing can the Christian more fitly evince his friendship with God than by a diligent endeavour to maintain a constant and intimate communion with Him. In addition to the regular tribute of his daily worship, if the soul of the believer be in a healthy condition, he will take occasion to frequently come into God's presence on purpose to have communion with Him. Friendship is best maintained by visits, and the more free and less occasioned by urgent business, the more are they appreciated. David, owned as a man after God's own heart (Act 13:22)—the equivalent of Abraham's being called His “friend”—said, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee...To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee...My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psa 63:1-5). *That* was the language of pure friendship.

Intimate converse and close communications characterise the dealings of one warm friend to another. Things which I would not discuss with a stranger—personal matters—I would be silent upon to a mere acquaintance, I freely open to one I delight in. It is thus between God and the reconciled soul. It is so on *His* part: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psa 25:14). “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face [without restraint or reserve] as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exo 33:11)—thus Scripture makes this freedom of communications one of the marks of spiritual friendship. So, too, we find the Lord Jesus saying to His beloved apostles, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Joh 15:15). Do you, my reader, know anything of this experience? Are you in such close touch with Him as to make this (morally) possible? It is through His Word, God now speaks to us: Do you know what it is for your heart to “burn” while He talks with you by the way and “opens” to you the Scriptures (Luk 24:32)?

Yet this intimate conversation is not one-sided, but is reciprocal: The reconciled one finds liberty in opening his heart unto his heavenly Friend, as he does to none other. This is his holy privilege: “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him” (Psa 62:8). How do you treat your best earthly friend? When you have not seen him for a season, how warmly you welcome him, how freely you express your pleasure at meeting him again, what utterances of good will and delight do you make! Equally free should the saint be with his Lord. He should pour out his heart with joy and gladness. He should unrestrainedly avow his delight in the Lord. He should bring with him a sacrifice of praise—that is, the fruit of his lips, giving thanks (Heb 13:15). Such will not only be acceptable unto Him, but it will give Him pleasure. It is on these occasions that He says, “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue” (Song 4:11)—such communications are sweet unto Me.

But there are times when one is so sorely troubled and weighed down that his expressions of delight and joy toward a loving friend will be restrained. True, yet that only affords occasion for another attribute of friendship to be exercised—namely, to freely *unburden his heart* unto him. Thus it is with the reconciled soul and God: He will speak to Him more freely and make mention of things which he would not to his nearest and dearest earthly friend. This is the Christian's privilege: To ease his heart before God. Said the Psalmist, “I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble” (Psa 142:2); and He deems Himself honoured by such confidences. The more communion there is betwixt God and us over our distresses, the more will He discover our secret faults, and the more will we disclose again to Him. The one is a sure consequence of the other: After speaking of our fellowship with God in 1 John 1:3, it is added, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1Jo

1:9). One great part of our friendship with God is the taking of Him fully into our confidence, as on His part, it is to pardon us.

Having confidence in a friend, we freely *seek his help and advice*. When describing a close friend, David said, “We took sweet counsel together” (Psa 55:14). And that is how we ought to treat our heavenly Friend, making use of Him, counting upon His favour and help in all our concerns. That is both our privilege and duty: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Pro 3:6)—seek His counsel, give yourself up to His guidance. That little (and large) word “all” includes small things, as well as great! Therein the friendship of God excels that of others: We are loath to trouble an earthly friend about trifles, but we may spread the smallest matter before Him who has numbered the very hairs of our head. Therein we honour Him, for it is an acknowledgement on our part that He ruleth all things, even the very least.

One is very careful in seeking to avoid giving any offence unto a dear friend and doing all in our power to please him—apply that Godwards, and it has reference to our *obedience*. Therefore, do we find Christ saying, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). That “if” is addressed to responsibility and is the testing of our profession: It is by obedience we evidence and approve ourselves to be His *friends*. Obedience goes much further than resisting sin and abstaining from wicked works: “Cease to do evil; Learn to do well” (Isa 1:16-17). It is not sufficient to forbear the commission of sin if we perform not our duty. The fig tree was cursed not because it bore evil fruit, but because it was barren. There are many who, like the Pharisees, pride themselves on negations: “I am not profane, immoral, irreligious.” But that gives them no title to regard themselves as friends of Christ: Are they actually doing the things He has enjoined—that is the crucial test and characteristic mark of the reconciled.

Observe, it is not “ye shall be,” but “ye are my friends, if ye do” (Joh 15:14). It is the doers of His Word whom the Lord owns as His friends: They who are as diligent in practicing His precepts as in shunning what He hates. And their obedience is not that of mercenary legalists, nor the forced work of slaves, but is the voluntary and joyful response of loving and grateful hearts. An action may have the appearance of friendship when there is nothing of good will behind it. But none can impose upon the Lord—He knows when there is inward conformity to His will, as well as outward compliance when a person’s “good works” are those of the formalist, or of a loving heart. If they be the latter, we shall not pick and choose between His precepts, but “do *whatsoever* he commandeth” (Job 37:12): “Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it *for thee*” said Jonathan to his friend (1Sa 20:4). That is indeed the longing and aim of every reconciled soul, but his infirmities and distempers often cause him to go halting.

Another characteristic or mark of friendship is *confidence*: “Mine own familiar friend, in whom I *trusted*” (Psa 41:9) said David. Nothing more readily undermines friendship than the harbouring of suspicions. It is because we have proved the staunchness and affection of another that we count him our friend, and rely upon him. Thus it is with a reconciled soul and God. He has shown Himself to be graciously disposed unto me, given me innumerable proofs of His lovingkindness and faithfulness, and that draws out my heart in confidence toward Him. The more I trust in Him and look to Him for help, the more is He pleased and honoured by me, and the more do I show myself to be His friend. “Cast thy burden upon the LORD” (Psa 55:22) is His blessed invitation, for He desires not His child should be weighted down by it. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1Pe 5:7). God would have His people act toward Him with holy familiarity, confiding in Him at all times, counting upon His goodness, reposing themselves in His love, making known their requests with thanksgiving, expecting Him to supply all their need. That is both our privilege and duty if we sustain to God the relationship of friends.

Where there is full confidence in a tried and trusted friend, we place a *favourable construction* upon even those actions of his which may puzzle and perplex us. We refuse to impute evil to or harbour suspicions against him. Any fancied slight he has given, any apparent unconcern or unkindness he has shown, anything in his letters which we do not understand, we leave until we again see him face to face, quietly assured that a satisfactory explanation will be forthcoming from him. Thus it is with the saint and his heavenly Friend. Some of His dealings sorely try and exercise him, yet he doubts not that He is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. Some of His dispensations are exceedingly trying to flesh and blood, but a believing soul will “Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace,” realizing that “behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face” (William Cowper, 1731-1800, hymnodist). Thus it was with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Love “thinketh no evil” (1Co 13:5), but favourably interprets the most mysterious of God’s ways, knowing that He is making all things work together for our good.

There is no real reason why anyone of ordinary intelligence should remain in doubt as to his spiritual state. If you faithfully examine yourself and honestly measure yourself by the different criteria we have mentioned in these articles, you should have no difficulty in determining whether you be still alienated from God, or reconciled to

Him. If you be at peace with Him, then you are making common cause with Him, warring against His foes—the devil, sin, the world. If you be reconciled to God, then you are His friend, evidencing the same by a friendlike disposition and deportment, conducting yourself toward Him, treating with Him, as one friend does with another. The Lord so add His gracious blessing that in His light, each of us may see light.

THE GREAT CHANGE

Some of our older readers may recall a book which made quite a stir in the religious world, especially the Arminian sections of it, some forty years ago. It was entitled, “Twice-born Men,” and was written in a somewhat racy and sensational style by a well-known journalist, Edward Harold Begbie (1871-1929). It purported to describe some startling “conversions” of notorious profligates and criminals under the evangelistic efforts of the Salvation Army and City Missions. Whether or not the reader is acquainted with that particular book, he has probably read similar accounts of reformations of character. He may, as this writer, have personally heard the “testimonies” of some unusual cases. We recall listening unto one in New York City some twenty-five years ago: A man past middle age who had “spent twenty Christmas days in prison,” who had been delivered from a life of crime, attributing his deliverance to the amazing grace of God and the efficacy of the redeeming blood of Christ, and who—to use one of his Scriptural quotations—had been given “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:3).

Many, if not all, of those reformed characters testify that so thorough was the work of grace wrought in them that their old habits and inclinations had been completely taken away, that they no longer had the slightest desire to return to their former ways, that all longing for the things which once enthralled them was gone, declaring that God had made them new creatures in Christ, that old things were passed away, and all things had become new (2Co 5:17). Personally, we do not deem ourself competent to pass an opinion on such cases. Certainly, we would not dare assign any limit to the wonder-working power of God; nevertheless, we should need to be in close contact with such people for some considerable time and closely observe their daily walk, in order to be assured that their goodness was something less evanescent than “a morning cloud, and as the early dew,” which quickly vanishes (Hos 6:4). On the one hand, we should keep in mind the miraculous transformation wrought in the fierce persecutor of Tarsus; and on the other, we would not forget Matthew 12:43-45.

But this we may safely affirm, that such cases as those alluded unto above are not general or even common, and certainly must not be set up as the standard by which we should ascertain the genuineness of conversion—be it our own or another’s. Though it be blessedly true that in His saving operations, God communicates subduing and restraining grace to the soul—to some a greater measure, to others a lesser—yet it is equally true that He does not remove the old nature at regeneration or eradicate “the flesh.” Only One has ever trodden this earth who could truthfully aver “the prince of this world [Satan] cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30)—nothing combustible which his fiery darts could ignite. The godliest saint who has ever lived had reason to join with the apostle in sorrowfully confessing: “When I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom 7:21). It is indeed the Christian’s duty and privilege to keep himself from all outward sins: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not *fulfil* the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16); yet as the very next verse tells us, the flesh is *there*, operative, and opposing the spirit.

But we will go further. When such persons as those referred to above appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their “experience,” no matter how well suited its language may seem to their case, they are making an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse; and the consequence has been that many of God’s dear children were brought into sad bondage. Countless thousands have been led to believe that if they truly received Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, such a radical change would be wrought in them; that henceforth, they would be immune from evil thoughts, foul imaginations, wicked desires, and worldly lusts. But after they *did* receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour, it was not long ere they discovered that things inside them were very different from what they expected—that old inclinations were still present, that internal corruptions now harassed them, and in some instances, more fiercely than ever before. Because of the painful consciousness of “the plague of his own heart” (1Ki 8:38), many a one has drawn the conclusion that he was never soundly converted, that he was mistaken in believing he had been born of God, and great is their distress.

Now one very important and necessary part of the work to which God has called His servants is “take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people” (Isa 57:14 and compare Isa 62:10); and if he would faithfully attend unto this part of his duty, then he must make it crystal clear to his hearers—believers and unbelievers—that God has nowhere promised to eradicate indwelling sin from the one who believes the Gospel. He *does* save the penitent and believing sinner from the love, the guilt, the penalty, and the reigning power of sin; but He does not in this life deliver him from the presence of sin. The miracle of God’s saving grace does indeed effect a real, a radical, and a lasting change in all who are the subjects of it—some being more conscious of the same and giving clearer evidence of it, and some (who previously led a moral, and perhaps religious, life) less so; but in no single instance does He remove from the being of that person “the flesh” or evil principle, which he brought with him when he entered this world. That which was born of the flesh is still flesh—though that which was born of the Spirit is spirit (Joh 3:6).

Not that the minister of the Gospel must swing to the opposite extreme and teach, or even convey the impression, that the Christian can expect nothing better than a life of defeat while he be left in this scene; that his foes—both internal and external—are far too mighty for him to successfully cope with. God does not leave His dear child to cope with those foes in his own power, but strengthens him with might by His Spirit in the inner man; yet he is required to be constantly on his guard, lest he grieve the Spirit and give occasion for Him to suspend His operations. God tells the saint, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9), but that grace must be *sought* (Heb 4:16) and *used* (Luk 8:18); and if it be sought humbly and used aright, then “he giveth more grace” (Jam 4:6), so that he is enabled to fight the good fight of faith. Satan is indeed mighty, but there is one yet mightier: “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1Jo 4:4); and therefore is the Christian called upon to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph 6:10); and though while severed from Christ, he can produce no fruit (Joh 15:5), yet strengthened by Christ, he “*can* do all things” (Phi 4:13). Christians are “overcomers” (1Jo 2:13, 5:4; Rev 2:7).

Thus we see once more that there is a balance to be preserved: Avoiding at the one extreme the error of sinless perfectionism, and at the other, that of spiritual defeatism. Truth is to be presented in its Scriptural proportions, and not dwelt unduly on either its gloomy or its bright side. When one is regenerated, he is effectually called “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9); yet if an unconverted soul reading those words forms the idea that should God quicken him, all ignorance and error will be immediately dispelled from his soul, he draws an unwarrantable conclusion and will soon discover his mistake. The Lord Jesus promises to give rest unto the heavily-laden soul which comes to Him, but He does not thereby signify that such an one will henceforth enjoy perfect serenity of heart and mind. He saves His people from their sins (Mat 1:21), yet not in such a way that they will have no occasion to ask for the daily forgiveness of their transgressions (Luk 11:4). It is not that His salvation is an imperfect one, but that it is not completely experienced or entered into in *this* life, as such passages as Romans 13:11, 1 Peter 1:5 show. The “best wine” is reserved into the last. Glorification is yet future.

Above we have said that when such characters as those mentioned in the opening paragraph appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their “experience,” they make an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse. They are not the only ones who do so, and since many have been stumbled by failing to understand that verse aright, a careful exposition of it is called for. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17). It must be admitted in all fairness that the *sound* of those words decidedly favours those who claim that such a miracle of grace has been wrought in them, that the old nature with its evil propensities was eradicated when they were born again. But in view of the very different experience of the vast majority of God’s children of the last two thousand years—of whom we have any reliable knowledge—must we not pause and ask, Is *that* really the *sense* of the verse? If so, how shall we account for the actual history of the most eminent Christians? And if not, what other meaning can we legitimately ascribe to that verse? Probably there are few of our readers who have not been perplexed by its language.

The careful student will observe that we have *omitted* the opening word of 2 Corinthians 5:17, which is done eight times out of ten by those who quote it; nor are we acquainted with any exposition that satisfactorily explains its force. “*Therefore* if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Obviously, that “therefore” is where we must begin in any critical examination of the verse. It indicates that a conclusion is here drawn from a foregoing premise, and tells us this verse is not to be regarded as a thing apart, complete in itself, but rather as intimately related to something preceding. On turning back to verse 16, we find that it, in turn, opens with “Wherefore” (the same Greek word being used), which at once serves to *classify* the passage, indicating that it is a didactic or *doctrinal* one, wherein the apostle is presenting an argument, or a reasoned-out train of thought; and not a hortatory passage wherein a call unto duty is made, or a biographical passage in which an experience of the soul is delineated. Unless that key be used, the passage remains locked to us.

The key is hung upon the door by the presence of its introductory “therefore” or “wherefore”; and if it be ignored, and instead, we force the door, then its lock is strained, or its panels and hinges broken. In other words, the interpretation given to it will be a strained and unsatisfactory one. And such has indeed been the case with those who sought to explain its meaning *without* giving any due weight to—using—the very word on which the verse turns. Disregarding the opening “therefore,” it has been commonly assumed that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is speaking of the miracle of regeneration and describing what is thereby effected in the one experiencing the same. But those who gave the verse that meaning at once felt themselves faced with difficulties, and were obliged to whittle down its terms or qualify its language—for it is an undeniable fact, a matter of painful consciousness to Christians, that though some of the “old things” which characterised them in their unregeneracy have “passed away,” yet others of them have *not* done so, nor have “*all* things” yet become new within them.

In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, one otherwise excellent expositor tells us: “In the Old Testament [Isaiah 43:18-19; 65:17] the effects to be produced by the coming of the Messiah are described as a making all things new. The final consummation of the Redeemer’s kingdom in heaven is described in the same terms, ‘he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev 21:5). *The inward spiritual change* in every believer is set forth in the same words, because it is the type and necessary condition of this great cosmical change. What would avail any conceivable change in things external, if the heart remained a cage of unclean birds? The apostle therefore says that if any man be in Christ, he experiences a change *analogous* to that predicted by the prophet, and like to that which we still anticipate when earth shall become heaven. ‘Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2Co 5:17). Old opinions, plans, desires, principles, and affections are passed away; new views of truth, new principles, new apprehensions of the destiny of man, and new feelings and purposes fill and govern the soul.”

It is accrediting just such extravagant statements as the above—which is a fair example of those made by many other good men who have held influential positions in the churches—that have brought so many of God’s little ones into cruel bondage, for they know full well that no such great change has been wrought in them as like unto that which will obtain on the new earth, concerning which God assures us, “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie,” and where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:27, 4). We make so bold as to say that the Christian experience of that expositor falsified his own assertions. “Old opinions and plans” many indeed pass away when a person is soundly converted, but it is *not true* that old “desires, principles, and affections” pass away—on the contrary, they remain, are active, and plague him to the end of his course; otherwise, there would be no corruptions for him to resist, no lusts which he is exhorted to mortify.

It is really surprising to find some excellent men—whose writings are generally most helpful, and whose memories we revere—uttering such absurdities when interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:17 (The explanation is that, like ourself, they too were compassed with infirmity). Another of them wrote of the Christian: “He concludes that he is in Christ, because he is ‘a new creature.’ He finds ‘old things passed away, and all things become new.’ His old secure, benumbed, unfaithful conscience is passed away. His old perverse, stubborn, rebellious will; he has a new will. His old strong, sensual, corrupt, unbelieving, impenitent heart is gone...his old disordered, misplaced, inordinate affections...He has new thoughts, new inclinations, new desires, new delights, new employments.” True, he closes his paragraph by saying, “sometimes (i.e. formerly) carnal, but now in some measure spiritual; sometimes worldly, but now in some degree has his conversation in Heaven; sometimes profane, but now in part holy”—which not only virtually contradicts his previous sentences, but serves to illustrate what we said above about men creating their own difficulties when ignoring the key to a passage, and being obliged to tamper with its terms to make them fit their interpretations.

The Greek word for “passed away” is a very strong one, as may be seen from such passages as Matthew 5:18, 24:34; James 1:10; 2 Peter 3:10, and signifies (not from its etymology, but its *usage*) a removal, a making an end of. Whatever be the “old things” referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:17, they are not merely subdued, or temporarily put to sleep, only to waken again with fresh vigour, but are “passed away”—*done with*. Therefore, to define those “old things” as “old affections, old dispositions of Adam”—as still another theologian does—is utterly misleading, and one had supposed his own spiritual history had taught him better than to make such an assertion. An older writer is somewhat more satisfactory when he says, “By old things, he means all those corrupt principles, self ends, and fleshly lusts belonging to the carnal state, or the old man; all these are ‘passed away,’ not simply and perfectly, but only in part at present, and wholly in hope and expectation hereafter.” The very fact that such a frittering of “passed away” was deemed necessary makes us highly suspicious of his definition of the “old things”; and should make us search for an alternative one.

CONFESSION OF SIN

This article is by Joshua Caryl (1602-1673, a.k.a. Joseph Caryl).

“I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (Job 7:20). Though to speak a general confession be an easy matter and every man’s duty, yet to make a genuine confession is a hard matter and a work beyond man. As no man can say (in a spiritual sense) Jesus is the Lord, “but by the Holy Ghost” (1Co 12:3), so no man can say (in a holy manner) I have sinned, but by the Holy Spirit. Good and bad, believers and unbelievers, speak often the same words, but they cannot speak the same things, nor from the same principles: nature speaks in the one; in the other, grace. One may say very passionately he hath sinned, and sometimes almost drown his words in tears; but the other saith repentingly, “I have sinned,” and floods his heart with godly sorrows.

The general confessions of the saints have these four things in them: 1. Besides the fact, they acknowledge the blot: that there is much defilement and blackness in every sin; that it is the pollution and abasement of the creature. 2. They confess the fault: that they have done very ill in what they have done, and very foolishly, even like a beast that hath no understanding. 3. They confess a guilt contracted by what they have done: that their persons might be laid liable to the sentence of the Law for every such act, if Christ had not taken away the curse and condemning power of it. Confession of sin (in the strict nature of it) puts us into the hand of justice; though through the grace of the new covenant, it puts us into the hand of mercy. 4. Hence the saints confess all the punishments threatened in the Word to be due to sin, and are ready to acquit God whatsoever He hath awarded against sinners—see Daniel 9:7.

The manner in which saints confess sin widens the distance between theirs and the general confessions of wicked men. The saints confess *freely*: Acknowledgements of sin are not extorted by the pain and trouble which seizeth on them, as in Pharoah, Saul, Judas. But when God gives them best days, they are ready to speak worst of themselves; when they receive most mercies from God, then He receives most and deepest acknowledgments of sin from them. They are never so humbled in the sight of sin, as when they are most exalted in seeing the salvations of the Lord. The goodness of God leads them to repentance—they are not driven to it by wrath. *Feelingly*: When they say they have sinned, they know what they say. They taste the bitterness of sin, and groan under the burdensomeness of it, as it passes out in confession. A natural man’s confessions run through him as water through a pipe, which leaves no impression or scent there, nor do they any more taste what sin is than the pipe doth of what relish water is. *Sincerely*: They mean what they say—see Psalm 32:2. The natural man casts out his sin as seamen cast their goods overboard in a storm, which in the calm, they wish for again. *Believingly*: While they have an eye of sorrow upon sin, they have an eye of faith upon Christ. Judas said he had sinned in betraying innocent blood, but instead of washing in that blood, he defiled himself with his own. No wicked man ever mixed faith with his sorrows, or believing with confession.—*Joseph Caryl, 1645*

OCTOBER

INQUIRY REWARDED

Since we are creatures prone to extremes, we need to be constantly on our guard against permitting the pendulum of life swinging too far over to the right hand or to the left. Even a virtue will degenerate into a vice if it be not duly controlled—as justice untempered by mercy, or mercy ignoring the requirements of righteousness. It is only as our character is formed and our conduct is regulated by the Word of God that a due balance will be preserved. If on the one hand miserliness be condemned—“there is that withholdeth more than is meet” (Pro 11:24)—so prodigality

and wastefulness is equally reprehensible: “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (Joh 6:12). If callousness and hard-heartedness, being “without natural affection” (2Ti 3:3), is a mark of moral degeneracy, so to be carried away by his emotions is unbecoming to a saint: We are bidden to mortify “inordinate [excessive] affection,” as well as “evil concupiscence” (Col 3:5).

In view of what has just been alluded to, it is meet we should point out that if on the one side we find the Scriptures reprehending curiosity, yet on the other, they contain many examples wherein a spirit of inquiry was divinely rewarded. It is the idle, carnal, profitless curiosity which is disallowed; while it is the reverent and practical inquiry—which issues from a holy ambition—that is encouraged. There is a wide difference between a vain inquisitiveness and a sincere desire to obtain fuller knowledge of what is pleasing to God and will prove to be profitable unto the soul. The query of Zacharias unto the angel, “Whereby shall I know this?” (Luk 1:18), proceeded from unbelief, but when the mother of our Lord inquired, “How shall this be?” (Luk 1:34), she voiced a becoming perplexity. Pilate’s “What is truth?” (Joh 18:38) issued not from a heart that desired to be taught, but “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (Psa 119:9) expresses a genuine longing to learn how to overcome evil.

When Abraham said, “Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” (Gen 15:2), that was neither the language of unbelief nor the query of impertinent curiosity, but the breathing of honest perplexity and reverent inquiry. Consequently, the Lord did not rebuke him for his impudence, but favoured him with a gracious revelation. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the bush and he said, “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt” (Exo 3:3), he spoke “as one inquisitive and bold in his inquiry” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714), as is clear from the Lord’s response. But when, on a later occasion, he made request, “Shew me thy glory” (Exo 33:18), he was very far from asking for the gratification of any natural desire; rather, he was anxious for a better and clearer revelation of Jehovah, and the same was granted unto him.

“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?” (Mat 9:14). The occasion was when Matthew, recently called by Christ, had made a feast of thanksgiving, of which our Lord and the apostles partook (Mat 9:9-11, and compare Luke 5:29). Unlike the questions of the scribes and lawyers—the Pharisees and Sadducees who sought only to ensnare the Saviour—this inquiry was a desire to resolve their perplexity. It is clear from John 4:1-2 and Matthew 11:2-14 that the followers of John the Baptist continued during our Lord’s ministry to form a separate body. They followed the rules which John had laid down for them, so that they had their own days of fasting and their own forms of prayer (Luk 11:1). It was because Christ’s disciples fasted not—so different from the conduct of the master they revered—they asked this question. It was answered not with sternness, but with gentleness.

“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Mat 11:3). Poor John was languishing in prison—not singing praises as the two apostles in the Philippian dungeon (Act 16), but dejected, disappointed at the non-appearance of the Messianic kingdom. Apparently, his disciples had free access to him (Luk 7:18) and brought word to him of the ministry of Christ. Though His preaching attracted great multitudes, and though He performed startling miracles, yet all things continued as before—there was neither deliverance for himself, nor for the Nation. Under this perplexity, his heart was sick from hope deferred (Pro 13:12), he took the only wise course and sent to Christ, asking—almost in despair—“Art thou he that should come...?” (Mat 11:3): If so, why tarry the wheels of Thy chariot? In His answer, Christ declared that the promised One *had* come: His miraculous works evidenced it. But above the signs and wonders, “to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luk 7:22), His kingdom was to be one of pardon of sin and peace of conscience! “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Mat 11:6) was a warning for John to find no stumbling-block in the humiliation of Christ and the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

“Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Mat 17:10). The scribes believed in and taught a literal fulfilment of Malachi 4:5, so the apostles were puzzled over the brief appearing and then the disappearing of Elijah when Christ was transfigured. If Elijah was to come and prepare the way, why had he appeared on the mount for a moment only? Wisely did they spread their problem before Christ, for He never discouraged any one who sought Him in honest perplexity. His answer (Mat 17:12) was a repetition of what He had said in Matthew 11:13-14. Men were expecting the re-appearing of the great Tishbite as the forerunner of Christ, hence the question asked of John (Joh 1:21)—a vacant chair is still placed for him at all the great Jewish solemnities. But the true meaning of Malachi 4:5 had been intimated by the angel in Luke 1:17, confirmed in Matthew 11:14—if they really accepted John’s message, they need look for no further fulfilment of Malachi 4:5, for the Baptist’s message continues unto the end: Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 3:9. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mat 11:15) was always used by Christ where something more than natural perspicuity was required, namely, spiritual discernment—without *that*, prophecy is a sealed book.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

34. Philippians 1:8-11, Part 2 (1:9)

How different are the prayers of Scripture from those which we are accustomed to hear in religious gatherings! Who ever heard this petition offered in public: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phi 1:9) or “sense”? How many now in the “churches” would understand its purport if they should hear it? True spirituality, vital godliness, and personal piety have almost become an unknown quantity in Christendom today. Even if we turn to that much smaller circle which prides itself in being sound in the Faith and upholding the banner of Truth, how very different is this bold and comprehensive request, [that love] “may abound yet more and more” (Phi 1:9) from the halting and half-hearted, “If it can please Thee to favour us with a sip” or “a few crumbs,” of those who seem utterly afraid to ask for anything worthy of such a God as ours! How little can such souls be acquainted with “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10). We entreat them to seriously ponder the petitions of Paul and observe that *he* was not straitened, and therefore, he asked for no half measures or scanty portion. Above all, realise that these prayers are recorded for our instruction, for our encouragement, for our emulation.

As pointed out in our last, the substance of this petition was that there might be a better balance in these saints, that their love and knowledge might keep pace with each other, that their affections should be intelligently exercised. Paul longed that their warm-heartedness should be accompanied and directed by a well-instructed understanding; that they might have a spiritual judgment which would cause them to weigh things and enable them to discriminate between the true and the false; that they might perceive what to love and what to hate, what to seek and what to shun; that they should be able at all times to distinguish between duty and sin, and know what *was* their duty, no matter how dark the times or how difficult their circumstances and case. In order thereto, the apostle requested first that they be granted a better and fuller “knowledge”—that they be more thoroughly instructed from the Word. Second, that their love be regulated by “judgment” or wisdom, or spiritual instinct—an enlightened perception of the fitness of things. Third, that they might possess something more than a mere theoretical knowledge, namely, that which is obtained by and through “sense”—the soul has faculties which correspond to the five senses of the body.

First, “judgment” [or “sense”] here has the force of *faith*—for it is through faith we perceive, know, and understand spiritual things. Second, by “judgment” is meant *experience*—something distinct from and following faith. Thus in Romans 5, after declaring we are “justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1), the apostle went on to show how faith is educated and added unto through God’s dealings with us: “Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience” (Rom 5:3-4). By means of the trials which faith encounters and the discipline of daily life, we are taught humble submission to God, and, notwithstanding obstacles and failures, to persevere in the path of duty. As we do so, God graciously supports the soul and communicates His consolations; and faith is strengthened to meet the next trial. Thereby, we obtain a personal experience of God’s goodness and faithfulness, as well as of our frailty and sinfulness. We acquire a first-hand acquaintance with the reality of the snares against which His Word warns us and of the veracity of His promises by which He cheers us. This “experience” breeds “hope” (Rom 5:1-4), or a steady confidence and growing expectation that God will not suffer us to abandon our profession and make shipwreck of the faith, but will continue ministering to us, delivering us from our foes, and finally bringing us safely through to Glory.

This “experience” is an acquired knowledge in spiritual matters, founded on sense. It is a personal realisation of the mercy, power, longsufferance, and grace of God. The Christian starts out with a bare faith in the veracity of God or certainty of His promises. He doubts not that, in due course, God will make them good unto him. But later, as God performs one promise after another, there is a sense of experience added to his faith, which deepens his assurance and enables him to face the future with still greater confidence in God: “By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me” (Psa 41:11). The young Christian—believing that his Father is a prayer-hearing God from the declarations of His Word—has no doubt about it. But in the process of time, he has occasion to say, “I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications” (Psa 116:1), for he now has sensible proof, a visible demonstration thereof. Six years ago, when Hitler and Mussolini were at the height of their success, we assured our friends on the authority of Scripture that their success would be a short-lived one: By now, we have actually *seen* that “the triumphing of the wicked is short” (Job 20:5).

The things of God are first cognized and apprehended by faith, and then by experience—by personal contact and more intimate acquaintance with them. By God’s effectual working in them that believe (1Th 2:13), the saints find that to be true which the Word affirms of them. This experimental knowledge of the Lord is spoken of as a “tasting” of Him (1Pe 2:3)—which is something even more convincing and satisfying than sight, as food and water are to a famished man. To taste His goodness, to feel His power, to experience His tender compassion is to have a real proof within ourselves. “When Christ doth heal our diseases, remove our anguish, sanctify our natures, give us the promised help in temptations, relieve us in our distresses, and bridles our corruptions, then we know that He is ours” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). The human side of this is presented in Hebrews 5:14: “Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” As it is by eating and drinking that we discover what foods agree or disagree with us, so by the exercise of our graces we learn what things and persons are helpful or harmful to us. As by our exercises at school we become proficient scholars, so by experimental knowledge—gained by exercising the faculties of our souls—do we become proficient believers.

By “sense” is also meant, “Deep and glorious *impressions on the soul*, over and above the light of faith or knowledge by ordinary experiences, and such impressions are truly sense than knowledge, as all find that enjoy them; and they are therefore, said to ‘passeth knowledge’ (Eph 3:19) and are entitled ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ (Phi 4:7), and to be rejoicing ‘with joy unspeakable and full of glory’ (1Pe 1:8). This high and heavenly sense and enjoyment, the apostles used to pray for on behalf of those they wrote to. Thus Paul for the Romans, ‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost’ (Rom 15:13). And Peter exhorted those Christians to maintain and not to lose the unspeakable joy they had at conversion by exhorting them to keep up that sense and taste, even as new-born babes (1 Pe 2:2-3). He would have them, though men in understanding, yet always to be as babes in their affections and tastings of the love and goodness of God; and if they wanted it, to cry for it” (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680). Have you received fulfilment of this promise, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Psa 36:8)?

Third, *its reasons*. Were we making an analysis of any strictly doctrinal portion of Scripture, we should style the things mentioned in Philippians 1:10-11 “the *effects* of an ardent love as it is regulated by knowledge and all sense”; and such indeed *are* the four things specified. But since the contents of these verses are a part of the apostle’s prayer, it seems to us that they should be regarded as so many supporting pleas of the request which he had just made. He longed to see the affections of these Philippian saints intelligently directed, in order that they might first “approve things that are excellent”; second, that they might “be sincere”; third, that they should be “without offence till the day of Christ”; and fourth, that they should be “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:10-11). Those were the reasons *why* he asked for them that particular blessing. How they serve to emphasise the great importance and value of love being enlightened! How much depends upon having our affections educated by spiritual knowledge and controlled by spiritual sensibility! How the walk of a well-balanced Christian will honour his Lord! What blessed consequences follow when heavenly wisdom and mature experience guide the actions of a heart that is warm toward Christ and His redeemed! Then let us strive diligently after such.

“That ye may approve things that are excellent” (Phi 1:10). Here again, there is a fulness in the Greek terms, which is difficult to translate adequately by any single equivalents in English, the margin giving us the alternative, “that ye may try things that differ.” However, in this instance, the two renderings come to much the same thing. Following our usual custom, we will put the reader in possession of the main facts, so that he can check our exposition and draw his own conclusions. The Greek word here—rendered “try” in the margin—denotes that kind of trial to which metals are subjected when their nature and genuineness is being tested. Thus, when the apostle says, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1Pe 1:7), the resemblance is that of the goldsmith submitting the ore to a process of proof in his crucible. All is not gold that glistens! The uninstructed eye is not able to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit—the metal must be properly examined, tested by the “touchstone” and by fire to ascertain beyond doubt whether it be precious, or worthless.

Elsewhere, the apostle Paul frequently made use of this same metaphor: “*To prove* the sincerity of your love” (2Co 8:8), which denotes, to give opportunity to attest the genuineness of your love. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; *prove* your own selves” (2Co 13:5)—take nothing for granted, but honestly and diligently examine your hearts and lives, and ascertain whether or not your profession be a valid one. “*Prove* all things; hold fast that which is good” (1Th 5:21). In the preceding verse, he had said, “Despise not prophesyings,” which, though they proceeded from gifted men, were not infallible, and therefore, needed to be carefully pondered and weighed in “the balances of the Sanctuary.” In each passage (as also Galatians 6:4, 1Ti 3:10, etc.), the same Greek word

("dokimazo") is used as the one rendered "try" and "approve" in our text. Now that which the reader needs to realise is that before he is capable of attesting the genuineness of his love, verifying the validity of his profession, or proving the worth or worthlessness of the preaching he hears or reads—whether that teaching relates to doctrine or practice—his love must needs be warm and enlightened by knowledge and directed by good judgment; otherwise, he is likely to be deceived by what is erroneous.

But the Greek word also signifies "an *approving* or judgment of what is good, a savouring, a relishing, closing with and cleaving unto the goodness of it *as* good and best for him." A love which is directed by an enlightened mind and a holy heart not only has the capacity to detect counterfeits and contraries, but sweetly realises the excellence of divine things and delights therein. Thus, in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may *prove* what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"—where the Greek word for "prove" is the same as that in our text rendered "approve." In the preceding verse, Christian duty, as a whole, is viewed in reference to God Himself; but in verse 2, it is contemplated in connection with that system of things seen and temporal, amid which we live our lives day by day. Both of the imperatives are in the present tense, denoting a *process*; there is to be an ever-widening gulf between the character and conduct of the world and that of the saint, and an ever-growing conformity unto Christ not only outwardly, but inwardly, his thoughts and affections being more and more set upon things above—the "mind" here being the equivalent of the *whole soul*.

Regeneration of the communication of spiritual life is a divine act, in which we are wholly passive, being done once for all. But "renewing," as the tense denotes, is *continuous*. This too is a divine work, as Titus 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 4:16 inform us; yet it is also one in which *we* are called upon to be active, in which we are required to co-operate, as Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23 clearly show. This "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2) is the human-responsibility correlative of "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [senses]" (Phi 1:9). This "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" is accompanied by our responding to or making use of the light which God has given us—which is the necessary condition of our obtaining further light from Him. That light has a considerable extent already dispelled from our understandings and hearts the mists of self-love, and has revealed to us infinity, and worthier objects and pursuits. And if those objects have the supreme place in our affections, and those pursuits become the dominant quest of our energies, those mists will be still further cleared away, and we shall perceive yet more clearly the excellency and desirability of divine and spiritual things, and we shall become more absorbed in and satisfied with them.

As the "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2) is the counterpart of "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [senses]" (Phi 1:9); so the "that ye may *prove* what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" in Romans 12:2 is parallel with that "ye may *approve* things that are excellent" (Phi 1:10) of our prayer. Just in proportion, as we disdain and reject the principles, policies, and practices of the world (which may be summed up in self-love and self-pleasing), and earnestly endeavour to be governed by the precepts and promises of God—seeking to please and glorify Him, delighting ourselves in Him and being more assimilated to His holy image—do we acquire the capacity to *prove* for ourselves the excellency of His will. As by a spiritual touchstone, we perceive and realise the immeasurable superiority of the divine will to self-will, and joyfully surrender ourselves unto it. In other words, as our spiritual love to God and to His people is regulated by the knowledge of His Word and is confirmed by our spiritual sensibilities, we discover for ourselves that Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Pro 3:17). We learn by experience what peace and joy there is in being conformed to God's will.

There is a vast difference between a theoretical conviction that God's will is "good, and acceptable, and perfect," and actually proving it to be so for ourselves; yet that is what we *do*, just so far as we heed the injunctions, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). Just so far as we render a willing and more constant obedience to those exhortations, we not only prove for ourselves that God's commandments "are not grievous" (1Jo 5:3), but we discover that "in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa 19:11)—that is, in this life. Then it is that we "*sing* in the ways of the LORD" (Psa 138:5). Then it is that we obtain a personal acquaintance, an experimental realisation of the goodness, the acceptableness, and perfection of the divine will. We determine for ourselves both by an inward relish and an outward practice the excellency of His will. We both prove and approve that it is designed for *our* "good," for our being "acceptable" or pleasing to God, for our being "perfect"—that it contains in it everything necessary to make us spiritually complete and to be all that we ought to be. How much we lose dear reader, when we suffer ourselves to follow the dictates of self-will and be in any degree conformed to this evil world—the ways of the ungodly!

How far, and to what extent have you, my reader; and how far have I, the writer, proved for himself by actual experience, by rendering obedience to God the goodness, acceptableness, and perfection of His will? That is the question which each one of us should seriously put to himself. How far have I perceived the will of God in all the latitude and excellency of it, and how far has my heart and actions approved the same? There is great variety and vast number of sins forbidden and duties commanded. To what extent have we discerned the *spiritual part* of them, to what degree do we really relish the same? Do we cherish His precepts? Do we hold fast to them amid a perverse generation which universally despises and flouts them? Are all of my ways ordered by them? Can I truly say with the Psalmist, “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem *all* thy precepts concerning *all* things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Psa 119:127-128)? For it is in God’s commandments and precepts that His *will* is made known. Only so are we *really* approving things that are excellent (Phi 1:10), as Paul requested in our prayer.

The connection between the clause we have been considering and the one preceding it is therefore clear and simple. Where there be an increasing love which is directed by spiritual knowledge and holy sensibility, there is an enlarged capacity in the understanding to judge and discriminate—both to discern and detest what is injurious, and to recognise and cherish what is beneficial. Or, to invert the order of thought, the apostle longs that these saints should “approve things that are excellent” (Phi 1:10)—that they choose them, cleave unto them, delight in them, and be regulated by the same. But in order thereto, their love must both abound and be educated, so that they might have a true judgment and sense of the real worth of the different objects which competed for their hearts, and be suitably affected by the same; and that could only be obtained by *making trial* of them. Love is not to be exercised indiscriminately, but objects must be esteemed only according to their nature and worth, and that worth is experimentally ascertained by an actual acquaintance with them. As the sweetness of honey is best known by the eating of it, so the preciousness of divine and spiritual things is realised in proportion as the soul is actually and actively engaged with them.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

14. Rahab (2:14-21)

Rahab’s request of the two spies that they should enter into a solemn covenant with her—guaranteeing the preservation of her family from the impending destruction of Jericho (Jos 2:12-13)—placed them in a very awkward predicament; or it is more accurate to say that it presented an acute problem, which we fear some of our moderns would fail to solve aright. Only a short time before, Israel had received the following commandment concerning their treatment of the Canaanites: “When the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them” (Deu 7:2). In the light of that express prohibition, what ought the spies to do? The correct answer to that question turns upon the proper application of a real and necessary distinction between the divine commands—a distinction which has been drawn by well-instructed scribes in all ages—namely, between moral and positive laws: the one being grounded in essential rectitude; the other, in sovereignty. The moral nature with which God has endowed us teaches that parents should cherish and care for their children, and that children should revere and obey their parents; but it would not prompt Christians to practice baptism or observe the Lord’s Supper—those are positive institutions, *ad extra*.

The things enjoined by God’s positive laws depend solely on His sovereign pleasure, there being no other reason for them. But the things enjoined by His moral precepts are required not only by the authority of His will, but also by that nature and order of things which He has placed in the creation. The former are alterable at His pleasure, being appointed by mere prerogative; the other are perpetual, enforcing as they do the necessary distinctions of good and evil. All the ceremonial laws given unto Israel were of the former order: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself—the sum of the Ten Words—belonging unto the latter. The former are only of local application unto those who receive them by divine revelation; the latter are universally binding on all who are possessed of moral accountability. Whenever obedience to a positive law would involve a plain violation of the principles of the moral law, then the inferior must necessarily yield to the superior—though God

requires us to believe and do many things which are contrary to our depraved inclinations, yet He never demands from us that which is opposed to the moral nature He has given us.

An illustration of the distinction pointed out above is supplied by the case of David and his men when they were a hungered, and he requested five loaves of the showbread. Ahimelech the priest pointed out that that bread was not for common use, but had been sanctified unto the LORD (1Sa 21:3-6); yet after being assured the men were free from defilement, he gave the loaves unto David. None other than our Lord tells us that though it “was not lawful” for them to eat the sacred bread, yet they were “blameless” (Mat 12:3-6). Thus the positive law which prohibited the priest from giving the hallowed bread for food unto David and his men yielded to the pressing need of the situation. “The Son of David approves of it, and shows from it that mercy is to be preferred to sacrifice, that ritual observances must give way to moral duties, and that that may be done in a case of urgent providential necessity which may not otherwise be done” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

The law laid down in Deuteronomy 7:2 was, then, a positive one, and neither absolute in its force, nor binding in all cases—for justice itself requires that we must ever show mercy unto the merciful and never return evil for good. Now Rahab *had* shown mercy unto the two spies, and at great risk to herself. The instincts of humanity would fill them with kindly feeling toward their benefactress. Gratitude is a law of nature, and the law of nature takes precedence over positive precepts. Thus, those two godly Israelites had sufficient moral sensibility and spiritual discernment to perceive that Deuteronomy 7:2 could not debar them from acting justly and kindly toward her who had ensured their safety. Yet, though their duty was quite clear, that did not warrant them acting hurriedly and rashly. No arrangement should be entered into thoughtlessly, on the impulse of the moment. No definite promise should be made, until we have carefully weighed what we are committing ourselves unto, for our word must be our bond. Still less should we enter into any solemn compact without first prayerfully and thoroughly pondering all that is involved in it.

“And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye [better “thou,” as in verse 20] utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee” (Jos 2:14). Let it be noted that the fulfilment of Rahab’s request was suspended upon an “if”! Necessarily so, for those men were entering into a covenant with her—as her “swear unto me by the LORD” (Jos 2:12) intimated (compare 1 Samuel 20:16-17; Psalm 89:3)—and a covenant is a mutual compact in which each party agrees to do or grant certain things in return for the other fulfilling certain conditions. That which they agreed upon was qualified by three provisos, the first of which was that she must continue loyal to their interests. Thus, we see their circumspection in binding Rahab to this condition. “They that will be conscientious in keeping their promises will be cautious in making them, and perhaps may insert certain conditions which may otherwise seem frivolous” (M. Henry). The Christian should always qualify his promises with “the Lord willing” or “the Lord enabling me.”

They solemnly bound themselves for her preservation in the common destruction of Jericho. Their “our life instead of you to die” (margin) not only affirmed that they would be as much concerned about her safety as their own, but signified a definite imprecation of God’s judgment on them if they failed in their part of the agreement. “We will *deal* kindly and truly with thee” (Jos 2:14) was an assurance that their words would prove no empty ones, but that there should be an actual performance of what was promised. Observe, too, how they employed the language of faith: “It shall be when the Lord hath given us the land.” There was no doubt in their minds about the issue. Instead, they were fully convinced that Canaan was going to be conquered—yet “by the Lord” and as His “gift”! We too should wage the fight of faith with full assurance of the outcome, that the Lord will grant ultimate success so that each exclaims, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psa 23:6). In their “we will deal kindly,” they gave proof they were imbrued with no ferocious spirit, and were far from being the blood-thirsty creatures which infidels charge the conquerors of Canaan with being.

“Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall” (Jos 2:15). As soon as she received promise from the spies, Rahab set about assisting them in their escape. It was most convenient for them that her house was so situated, for had it been in the centre of the town, there was much more likelihood of their being recognised and arrested; but being on the outer wall, they could be let down by night unseen by unfriendly eyes. Yet let it be pointed out that the convenience was no mere happy coincidence, but *ordered* by the Lord, for of all men, He hath appointed “the bounds of their habitation” (Act 17:26)—a sovereign God ordained where each of us should be born and reside. But not only was the particular location of Rahab’s house of assistance to the spies, it also served to display more evidently the power of God, for it was the wall of the city which “fell down flat” (Jos 6:20), and the preservation of her lone house amid the universal devastation stood forth as a monument—both of His might and of His mercy.

“And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way” (Jos 2:16). It is striking to behold the blending together of divine power and human precaution all through this incident. The grand truth of divine preservation is typically illustrated, yet that preservation was accomplished *by* the use of means at every point: Rahab’s by obeying the orders she received, her house because of the cord in her window, and the spies by concealing themselves in the mountain. Let those who teach the “eternal security of the saints” see to it that they present it *with* the safeguards by which God has hedged it about. True, the accomplishment of His eternal purpose of grace is not left contingent upon the acts of the creature; nevertheless, He who has ordained the end has also appointed the means by which that end is reached. God has not promised to conduct any one to Heaven without the exercise of his faculties and the discharge of his responsibility. He deals with us throughout as moral agents, and requires us to heed His warnings and *avoid* that which would destroy us (1Co 9:27).

Committing my soul and its eternal interests into the hand of the Lord by no means releases me of obligation. “He who has fixed the limits of our life, has also entrusted us with the care of it; has furnished us with means and supports for its preservation, has also made us provident of dangers, and that they may not oppress us unawares has furnished us with cautions and remedies. Thus, it is evident what is our duty.” That, my reader, is a quotation not from the Arminian John Wesley, but from the Reformer, John Calvin!—alas that so many who claim to be Calvinists lack his wisdom and balance of doctrine. The truth of divine preservation is not designed as a shelter for either laziness or licentiousness. God’s promises are made to those who honestly strive against sin and mourn when tripped up by it, and not to those who take their fill thereof and delight therein—for He undertakes to keep His saints *in holiness* and not in wickedness. If God has turned our feet into that way which leadeth unto life, we must continue therein. Otherwise, we shall never reach our desired destination. Only those who press forward to that which is before reach the goal (Phi 3:14).

Saving faith is far more than an isolated act. It is a spiritual principle which continues to operate in those to whom it is communicated. Divine preservation works through Christian perseverance, for grace is given us not to render our efforts needless, but to make them effectual. God does not carry His children to glory in a state of passivity, but works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phi 2:13)—to hate and fear sin, to desire and strive after holiness, to heed His warnings, to shun the things which would destroy, to *keep* His commandments. The Christian must continue as he began, for Christian perseverance is the maintaining of godly affections and practices. We are indeed “kept by the power of God,” yet “through faith” (1Pe 1:5); and therefore, so long as the flesh is left in us, and we in the world, we are required to attend unto that exhortation, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12)—for the verses which follow solemnly remind us that many of those who came out of Egypt never entered Canaan! “They could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19).

“And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way” (Jos 2:16). Observe how this illustrates and enforces what we have just said above. The spies were under the immediate care of God, they had trustfully committed themselves into His hands, and He would certainly bring them safely back unto Joshua. Nevertheless, they were required to exercise care and caution; and they did so, for Joshua 2:22 shows they acted in exact accordance with Rahab’s counsels. They might have argued, We cannot afford to waste three days in the mountain, rather does it behoove us to make all possible speed to Joshua and make our report unto him. But that had been only the feverish energy of the flesh: “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16)—alas that that wise old proverb, “Slow but sure, is sure to do well” is now despised. Nor did those spies, under the plea of trusting God, recklessly disregard the peril of being captured by the pursuers—that would have been tempting Him, acting presumptuously, rather than believingly. God requires us to conduct ourselves circumspectly, to exercise good judgment.

“And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread [or “rope”] in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father’s household, home unto thee” (Jos 2:17-18). If the spies must need take due precautions for their personal safety, equally indispensable was it that Rahab should act in obedience with their orders; otherwise, they would be released from their promise, and the oath would no longer be binding upon them. Their oath, as pointed out above, was for the confirmation of the covenant they had entered into with Rahab—and a covenant is a mutual compact between two parties, which is rendered null and void if either of them fails to keep his part of the agreement. Now the Gospel itself is a covenant, for in it, God offers and promises certain blessings upon our acceptance of His offer and compliance with His terms (Psa 50:5, Jer 50:5), and we are required to be “*mindful* always of his covenant” (1Ch 16:15) and to “*keep* his covenant” (Psa 25:10)—for a fuller discussion of this, see the March and April articles on “Reconciliation.”

The binding of the scarlet cord in her window was for the purpose of *identification*, so that when Israel made their attack upon Jericho, they might know which was her house, and spare it. It must be borne in mind that when the spies gave her those instructions, they knew not that the Lord was going to work a miracle, and cause the walls of the city to fall down without any assault upon them by Israel. That was not revealed unto Joshua until later (Jos 6:5), illustrating the fact that God's will is made known unto us only a step at a time—He sees the end from the beginning (Act 15:18), but He does not permit us to do so (Joh 13:7). That cord was the “token” for which she had asked (Jos 2:12), and it enabled the army of Israel to ascertain which was her house—just as the sprinkled blood on the door-posts of the Hebrews in Egypt caused the angel of death to recognise their houses and pass over them when He went forth to slay the firstborn (Exo 12:13); and just as the 144,000 who are exempted from judgment are “sealed...in their foreheads” (Rev 7:3), their identifying mark being that of *obedience* to the Lord (Rev 14:1-5)—for it is obedience which manifestatively distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil.

“And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on *our* head, if any hand be upon him” (Jos 2:19). Thus, the terms of the covenant or agreement were precisely stated and carefully explained to her before they parted. Those of Rahab's family who were to be preserved from the common destruction must be inside her house, *separated from the wicked*. If they forsook that shelter and mingled with the heathen inhabitants of Jericho, they would perish with them—as Noah and his family had in the flood—unless they had separated from the ungodly and taken refuge in the ark. Typically, this teaches the imperative necessity of separation from the world if we would escape from its impending doom. The case of Rahab's family remaining secluded in her house as the condition of their preservation is parallel with Acts 27, where we find that though the angel of God assured Paul, “There shall be no loss of any man's life” (Act 27:22), yet when the sailors were about to abandon it, he cried, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved” (Act 27:31)—and except Christians maintain separation from this evil world, they cannot escape destruction with it.

“And *if* thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear” (Jos 2:20). Let those who proclaim the grand truth of “the eternal security of the saints” fail not to give due place unto that “*if*”—the “*if*” not of uncertainty from the divine side, but of enforcing responsibility from the human. Let them carefully ponder the “*if*” in Romans 8:13 and 11:22; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Colossians 1:23; and Hebrews 3:6, 14. Scripture does not teach a mechanical security, but one which is obtained through our use of means and avoidance of dangers. The preservation of Rahab from destruction was conditioned upon her obedience to the instructions of God's messengers, and her use of the means they specified. First, she must mention not their business or betray them to their enemies. She must be loyal to them and promote their interests—a figure of love for the brethren. Second, she must place the scarlet cord in the window so that her house might be recognised—we must bear the identifying mark of God's children. Third, she must abide in her house—we must maintain separation from the world.

“And she said, According unto your words, so be it” (Jos 2:21). There was no resentment, no offering of objections. “And she bound the scarlet line in the window” (Jos 2:21), manifesting by her obedience that she was an elect and regenerate soul. Unless you, my reader, are walking in obedience to God, you have no scriptural warrant to conclude you are “eternally secure.” The *reward* of her faith and obedience is revealed in other passages. First, she “perished not with them that believed not” (Heb 11:31). Second, she “dwelleth in Israel” (Jos 6:25): from being a citizen of heathen Jericho, she was given a place in the congregation of the Lord. Third, she became the honoured wife of a prince in Judah, the mother of Boaz, and one of the grandmothers of David (Mat 1:5). Fourth, she was one of the favoured ancestresses of the Saviour (Mat 1). Thus did God do for her exceeding abundantly above all that she asked or thought: delivered from awful depths of sin and shame, elevated to heights of honour and dignity.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

12a. Its Responsibilities

This is an aspect of our subject which will by no means appeal to the empty professor, nor, we may add, to the backslider. The Antimonian is all for hearing about the free grace of God and His unforfeitable gifts, and if the preacher should point out that favours and privileges entail obligations, he is condemned by them for his legality;

but if he is to receive his Master's, "Well done" (Mat 25:21-23), he will not have the united approbation of a large congregation. It betrays a most unhealthy state of soul when we wish to hear only of what Christ did and procured *for* sinners, and little or nothing of what He requires *from* the beneficiaries of the same. God has inseparably joined together privilege and duty, relationship and obligation; and we are lacking an honest heart if we eagerly seize His promises and despise His precepts. It betrays a sad condition of soul if we are not anxious to ascertain, "What doth the LORD require of thee" (Mic 6:8).

It is our firm conviction that one of the main causes for such a vast number of empty professors and backslidden believers in Christendom today was the disproportionate and unfaithful preaching of most of the prominent 'orthodox' pulpits during the past century. Instead of giving a conspicuous place to that which *tested* profession—both doctrinally and practically—nominal saints were lulled into a false sense of security. Instead of insisting that conversion is but the beginning of the Christian life, an enlisting under the banner of Christ to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12)—in which the devil is to be steadfastly resisted and a ceaseless warfare waged against indwelling sin—the siren song of, "Once saved, always saved" was dinned into the ears of those whose walk was thoroughly carnal and worldly. Instead of a searching and probing ministry, the pulpit cried, "Peace, peace" unto those still at enmity with God.

Those who were flattered as being "the stalwarts of the Faith" were often most partial in which aspects of the Faith they concentrated upon. Those whose proud boast it was that they had "not shunned to declare unto you *all* the counsel of God" (Act 20:27), were, for the most part, men who repudiated human responsibility and detested the word "duty." It is handling the Word of God deceitfully to emphasise the expression, "ordained to eternal life" (Act 13:48) and to ignore "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). It is withholding that which is profitable unto souls (Act 20:20) to leave them in ignorance that Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey him*" (Heb 5:9). It is highly dishonouring to God when we pretend to magnify "the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7) if we fail to insist that His grace effectually teaches its recipients to be "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, [that] we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

Having dwelt upon the privilege-side of our theme in previous articles of this series, we should be woefully lacking in proportion and completeness if we now failed to consider the duty-side of it. It behoves us to point out God's full rights and just claims upon us, as well as His rich favours and unmerited mercies unto us. It becomes the reader to whole-heartedly welcome our efforts to execute this part of our task. The language of a reconciled soul is, and must be, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" (Psa 116:12). How shall I express my gratitude unto that blessed One who has shown me such unspeakable mercy? If the wrath of God be removed from me, and I am now taken into His unclouded and everlasting favour, how shall I now most fitly comport myself? Since such measureless love has been so freely lavished upon me, how can I best show forth my gratitude? That is the question we shall now endeavour to answer.

1. *By fervent praise unto God.* O what thanksgiving is due unto Him for His matchless grace! As it was the supreme demonstration of His love in sending forth His Son to make peace, that should be the principal spring of our thanksgiving. When God bids His people, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa 42:1), whom He gave "for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isa 42:6-7); the use which He enjoins them to make of the same is, "Sing unto the LORD a new song" (Isa 42:10). As the initial response of one who realises that his trespasses are no longer imputed to him—but instead that the perfect righteousness of Christ is reckoned to his account—must be "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 103:1), so too it should be his daily—as it will be his eternal—response.

"God might have destroyed us with less cost than He hath reconciled us: for our destruction there was no need of His counsel, nor fitting out and sending His Son, nor opening His treasures; a word would have done it, whereas our reconciliation stood Him at much charge. It was performed at the expense of His grace and Spirit to furnish His Son to be a sacrifice for our atonement. An inexpressible wonder that the Father should prepare His Son a mortal body that our souls might be prepared for immortal glory" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The apostle could not consider the will of our Father in this work without interrupting his discourse with a doxology: "To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Gal 1:4-5); and such should be our response. As the angels rejoiced in the manifestation of the wisdom and power of God in the incarnation of His dear Son, much more should we rejoice at the triumphant outcome of His mission and of our personal interest in the same, joining with them in their "Glory to God in the highest" (Luk 2:14).

Who is it, my reader, who maketh thee to differ from others? Is it not God? Then ascribe glory to Him. If He has made thee to differ from others in the exercise of His sovereign mercy, do thou differ from them in the sounding forth of His praises? When David considered the works of God's hand in the stellar heavens, he exclaimed, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psa 8:4)! And if we consider what sovereign favour hath wrought for and in the regenerate, well may we be overwhelmed with wonder. Pardon of but one sin would make us forever debtors to God, for every sin is a hatred of Him and renders us obnoxious to eternal torments. What then is due unto Him from those whom He had pardoned sins more in number than the hairs of their heads! O the marvel of it that one who is by nature a child of wrath should be made an heir of Heaven; that one so vile should be taken into the bosom of the Father! Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

2. *By care to please God.* Since He went to so much trouble and cost in restoring us, how our thoughts and affections should unitedly engage in earnestly endeavouring to please Him. The Decalogue is prefaced with "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exo 20:2), as an incentive and inducement for Israel to render cheerful obedience unto Him. "I am the LORD thy God who in Christ hath delivered thee from eternal death and brought thee into My everlasting favour" is the tenour of the Gospel—a far weightier motive for the Christian to place himself unreservedly at God's disposal. This it is which will demonstrate the worth and genuineness of our praise: Whether it be merely an emotional spasm, or the overflowing gratitude of a heart which has been won by Him. If our expressions of thanksgiving and worship be sincere, then the homage of our lips will be borne out by the honouring of God in our daily lives. Whenever I am tempted to gratify the flesh, my reply should be, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9); or "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" (2Sa 16:17)—shall I so evilly requite the One who has been so gracious unto me.

The service which God requires from us is that of love, and not of compulsion. We must indeed keep our eyes on the Rule, so that our actions may be conformed to its requirements; otherwise, God will ask, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa 1:12). But there must be something more: The Lord looketh on the heart, as well as the outward performances. Duties are not distinguished by their external garb, but by the spirit prompting them. A box of ointment with an affectionate regard for the Lord, nay a cup of cold water, is valued and registered. The smallest act of service unto God which issues from gratitude is prized by Him more highly than all the imposing works of men without it. It is at this very point that the saint differs radically from all others: Whatever be the religious performances of the legalist, the formalist, or the hypocrite, they proceed from some form of self-esteem; but that of the believer is wrought by gratitude. It is the love of Christ which constrains him, which moves him to take His yoke upon him, which so motivates him that his chief concern is to keep His commandments and show forth His praises.

If there be good will in the heart toward God, it will be evidenced by choosing and doing the things which are pleasing unto Him. There will be a readiness of heart unto obedience, for love prepares and predisposes the heart unto what He requires from us. Good will in the heart toward God expresses itself in the actual performing of what He has enjoined, for the language of gratitude is "his commandments are not grievous" (1Jo 5:3). When love to Rachel set Jacob a work, it was not unpleasant to him; and though it took him seven years, he deemed it not long. So far from a reconciled soul, feeling that God is a hard Master imposing a severe task upon him, he is thankful to have the opportunity to manifest his appreciation. When David made such costly preparations for the house of God, he asked, "But who am I?" (1Ch 29:14), considering it a marvel of condescension that the great God should accept aught at his hands. So far from begrudging any self-sacrifice, love will mourn that what has been done is so little and so imperfect, realising that nothing can be too much or too good for the Lord—and not only too small to answer God's love, but to adequately express his own.

3. *By trusting in God.* Since He be reconciled to me and I to Him, then it is both my privilege and duty to look to Him for the supply of every need and confidently expect the same. The Christian should habitually view Him as "the God of peace" (Heb 13:20); and under that title and relationship, implore Him for daily supplies of grace—for it is as such that He works in us "that which is wellpleasing in his sight" (Heb 13:21). God has promised to be "as the dew" unto His people under the Gospel (Hos 14:5); and as the dew descends from a clear sky, so does grace from the One who has blotted out our iniquities. We should look then continually for spiritual strength from God in Christ. All our approaches to Him should be begun and attended with a sense that we have been taken into His favour. In all His communications to His people, God acts as reconciled to them, and so should we eye Him whenever we come to the Throne of Grace. As there is not one mercy God shows us but springs from this relationship, so every duty we offer to Him and petition we make of Him should rise from a sense of the same. This should cause us to believe with a holy boldness.

Here is a cordial for us in our sorest problems and trials. What can the greatest difficulty or acutest strait signify when God remains reconciled to the soul in Christ! Providence is ordered by your best Friend. This is the grand stay which Christ has furnished His disciples: "That in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation" (Joh 16:33). Is not that a sufficient defence against all the roaring of men and the rage of Satan? Though the world frown, God in Christ smiles upon thee. It was a sense of their reconciliation to God which turned prisons into palaces and dungeons into chambers of praise for those who were persecuted by the ungodly. Here is a shield against fear, security against danger, a treasure against poverty. Under the sharpest affliction, the believer may distinguish between God as a loving Father and avenging Judge. Carnal reason and sense will indeed dispute against faith, and while they be listened unto, faith will stagger; but if the heart turns to and be engaged with a reconciled God, it will discern under the severest chastisement the rod of mercy, wielded by a love maintaining our best interests.

There should be an expecting of temporal mercies. If God were in Christ reconciling us to Himself, then most assuredly He will be in Christ giving forth all suited benefits. It is entirely inconsistent with His amity to withhold anything really needed by us, for in that case, as one pointed out, it would not then be a "much more" as Christ argued, but a *much less*: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Mat 7:11). Yet it is to be borne in mind that it is *only* "good things" which He has promised to give, and that He alone is the proper judge as to what is "good." If God feeds the ravens, certainly He will not permit His friends to starve. If He spared not His only Son, He will not begrudge mere food and raiment. Our covenant God will deny His children nothing which is for their welfare. If we lived in the realisation of that, how contented we should be in every situation!

4. *By cherishing God's peace.* "The remission of sins past gives not a permission for sins to come, but should be a bridle and a restraint" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa 130:4). The end of Christ's death cannot be separated: He is no Atoner for those He is not a Refiner, for He gave Himself to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). As there was a double enmity in us—one rooted in our nature and another declared by wicked works—so there must be a change both in our state and an alteration of our actions. God and sin are irreconcilable enemies, so that where there is peace with one, there must be war with another. Fire and water would sooner agree than a peace with God and a peace with sin. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21). We should be very tender of God's peace, that no breach fall out between us: "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (Job 34:32) must be our sincere desire and resolution; otherwise, we are but hypocrites.

Peace was broken by the sin of the first Adam; and though it was restored by the last Adam, yet our obedience is necessary if we are to enjoy the fruits of it: "Great peace have they which love thy law" (Psa 119:165). Then let us beware of relaxing in our watchfulness or of becoming self-confident in our ability to face temptations: "He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly" (Psa 85:8). "When we sought for pardon, sin was the great burden which lay upon our conscience; the wound which pained us at heart, the disease our souls were sick of; and shall that which we complained of as a burden become our delight? Shall we tear open our wounds which are in a fair way of being healed, and run into bonds and chains again after we are freed of them?" (T. Manton). That were indeed crass, folly, madness. Backsliders forsake their peace, as it is said of them: "They have forgotten their restingplace" (Jer 50:6). Peace can only be recovered as we repent of our sins and renew our covenant with God.

5. *By using our access to God.* The most blessed result or consequence of reconciliation is that believers have the right of approach unto God, and therefore, it is their privilege to freely avail themselves of the same. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:19, 22)—that is, with a firm belief in the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice and a firm reliance upon the same. As God was in Christ reconciling, so He is in Him receiving our praises and petitions. As Christ made satisfaction for us by His death, so He provides the acceptance of our sacrifices and services by His merits. Though justification be a transcendent mercy, yet it would not complete our happiness unless we could commune with God. Peace was not the thing God ultimately aimed at—it was but the medium: He would be our Friend, that there might be sweet intercourse between Him and His people. This is an inestimable privilege of which we should make constant use.

But those who would enjoy communion with the Lord must needs be careful to avoid everything which would separate from Him. He is a jealous God and will brook no rivals. If our fellowship with the Holy One is to be intimate and constant, then we must keep a close guard against grieving the Spirit. We must beware of cooling affections, slackening in the use of means and fighting against sin, slipping back into our old ways. If we neglect those

duties, there can be no real, acceptable, or satisfying drawing nigh unto God. Christ has indeed opened a new and living way for His people in God's presence, and has provided them with both the right and title so to do; nevertheless, there are certain moral qualifications required of them if they are to really draw nigh unto the Holy One—certainly those who simply offer cold and formal prayers do not do so.

There are many of God's own children who are cut off from conscious access to Him, for their sins have caused a breach (Isa 59:1-2): "With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward" (Psa 18:26). Loose walking severs our communion with God, and then He acts distantly toward us: "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" (Psa 13:1) has been the sorrowful lament of many a wayward saint. Our folly must be repented of and humbly confessed before there can be restoration unto fellowship with God. If we would draw near unto Him, it must be with "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:22)—i.e., our internal and external man cleansed from defilement, our members kept from evil and used for God. "Universal sanctification upon our whole persons and the mortification in an especial manner of outward sins are required of us in our drawing nigh to God" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

6. *By rejoicing in God.* How great should and may be the joy of believing souls! To be instated in the favour of God, to have the Almighty for our Friend, to have the light of His countenance shining upon us—the knowledge of that in the understanding is tidings of great joy, the sense of it in our hearts is "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1Pe 1:8). Reconciliation and the realisation of it are two distinct things. The one may be a fact, yet through unbelief or carelessness, I may lack the assurance of it. But what comfort and happiness is his who has the assurance that he is at peace with God, and the testimony that his conscience is sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb! Then, even though the fig tree blossom not, the fields yield no meat, and there be no herds in the stalls, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:18). "As sorrowful"—over our sins—yet "always rejoicing" in the Lord (2Co 6:10) is our bounden duty.

7. *By devotedness to God.* "What? know ye not...ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Co 6:19-20). That summarises the responsibilities of the reconciled—to conduct themselves as those who are not only the creatures, the children, but the purchased property of God, in whom He has the sole right. Since He spared not His own Son for us, we should withhold nothing from Him, but present ourselves unreservedly to Him as "a living sacrifice" which is indeed our "reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). We must spare no lust, nor indulge anything which is hateful to Christ, but denying self, take up our cross, and follow Him. Let us earnestly seek grace for the discharge of these duties.

THE GREAT CHANGE

To say that the "old things" which are "passed away" (2Co 5:17) when a person becomes a new creature in Christ refer to "old desires, principles, and appetites" is flatly contradicted by Romans 7:14-25. The old nature, the "flesh"—or evil principle—most certainly does not pass away, either wholly or in part, neither at the new birth, nor at any subsequent stage of his life while the Christian is left here on earth. Instead, the "flesh" remains in the saint, and "lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17), producing a continual conflict as he seeks to walk with and please the Lord. That a real and radical change takes place in the soul when a miracle of grace is wrought within him is indeed blessedly true, but to describe that miraculous change as consisting of, or being accompanied by, the removal of the old sinful nature or indwelling corruption is totally unwarranted and utterly unscriptural. And it is just because so many have been confused by this error and sufficiently affected by it as to have their assurance undermined and their peace disturbed, that we are now writing upon the subject.

It should be carefully noted that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not describing some exceptional experience which is attained unto only by a favoured few from among the children of God, but rather it is postulating that which is common to the whole family: "Therefore if *any man* be in Christ, he is a new creature." The "if any man" shows that we have here a proposition which is general, one which is of universal application unto the regenerate—as much so as though it said, "if any man be in Christ, his sins are pardoned." This at once assures the Christian that it is not through any fault of *his* that he comes short of such a standard as some would appear to measure unto. Nor is our verse giving an account of that which is gained as he reaches Christian maturity, still less that which will characterise him only when he reaches Heaven; instead, it predicates a present fact the moment one is vitally united to

Christ. It is true that the substantive “he is” (or “there is”—Revised Version) is supplied by the translators, yet the legitimacy, or rather the necessity, of it is evident from what follows: “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The opening “Therefore” bids us ponder the context. Upon turning to the verse immediately preceding, here is what we read: “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more” (2Co 5:16). We wonder how many of our readers understand that verse, or have even formulated any idea of what it is speaking about. If they consult the commentators, instead of finding help, they are likely to be the more perplexed—for no two of them are agreed as to its meaning, and some of them would have been more honest if they frankly owned they did not understand it, instead of darkening counsel by a multitude of meaningless words. Now it is not obvious that in order to a right perception of its significance, we must seek answers to the following questions: Whom was the apostle here instructing? Upon what particular subject was he writing? What required his taking up *this* subject? Or, in other words, What was his special *design* on this occasion? This alone will afford us the true perspective.

As we have pointed out before in these pages, it is necessary to know something of the circumstances *which occasioned* the writing of the Corinthian epistles, if we are to obtain an insight of many of their details. Soon after Paul departed from Corinth (Act 18), false teachers assailed the saints there, seeking to undermine the apostle’s influence and discredit his ministry. The result was that the believers became divided into opposing classes, engaged in disputes and being guilty of carnal walking (1Co 1:11-12). Those who said, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos” were in all probability the Gentile converts; whereas those who boasted, “I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (glorying in a fleshly relation to Him which the Gentiles could not lay claim unto) were undoubtedly the converted Jews. Thus, the enemies of the Gospel had succeeded in sowing the seeds of discord in the Corinthian assembly, creating jealousies and animosities by an appeal to *racial* prejudices, seeking to perpetuate the ancient enmities of Semitism and anti-Semitism.

Those false teachers had come to Corinth with “letters of commendation” (2Co 3:1), issued most likely by the temple authorities. They were “Hebrews” (2Co 11:22), professing to be “ministers of Christ”—i.e., of the Messiah (2Co 11:23); yet, in fact, they were “false apostles, deceitful workers,” the ministers of Satan (2Co 11:13-15). They had attempted to *Judaize* the Gentile saints, insisting that such could not participate in the covenant blessings and privileges of God’s people, unless they be circumcised and become the proselytes of the Mosaic religion. It was because of this the apostle had written to them, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1Co 7:19). *That* was indeed a startling thing to affirm, for it was *God* who had instituted circumcision (Gen 17:10), and for many centuries, it had entailed peculiar privileges (Exo 12:48). The Lord Jesus Himself had been circumcised (Luk 2:21). But now it was “nothing”—useless, worthless. Why so? Because of the *great change* which had taken place *dispensationally* in the kingdom or economy of God upon earth. Judaism had become effete, a thing of the past. Something new and better had displaced it.

Those false teachers had evidently denied that Paul was a true apostle of Christ, arguing (on the basis of what is recorded in Acts 1:21-22) that he could not be such, since he had not (as the Eleven) accompanied Him during the days of His flesh. This had obliged him to write unto the saints vindicating the divine authority of his apostleship (1Co 9:1-3). That his first epistle had produced a salutary effect upon them is clear from 2 Corinthians 1 and 2, yet it had neither silenced the “false apostles,” nor completely established those whose faith they had shaken; hence, the need for his second epistle to them. On the one hand, the major part of the assembly had expressed the warmest affection for him (2Co 1:14; 7:7); but on the other, the boldness and influence of his adversaries had increased, and their false charges and determined efforts to repudiate his apostolic authority (2Co 10:2; 11:2-7, 12:15) moved him to indignation. Those two adverse elements at Corinth is what serve to explain the sudden change from one subject to another, and the noticeable variations of language in this second epistle.

In the third chapter of 2 Corinthians (to which we devoted an article in the November 1938 issue), the apostle vindicated his apostleship in a manner which demonstrated the irrelevancy and worthlessness of the objections of his detractors, and which placed the faith of his converts on an unshakeable foundation by affirming that God had made him and his companions “able [or “sufficient”] ministers of the *new* testament” (2Co 3:6)—or as it should be rendered, “of the new covenant.” Therein, he struck the keynote to all that follows, for unto the end of the chapter, he proceeded to draw a series of contrasts between the old and new covenants, and exhibited the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former. By so doing, he entirely cut away all ground from under the feet of those who were troubling the Corinthian saints—for what mattered it whether or no Paul had companied with Christ during the three and a half years of His public ministry, or whether his converts were circumcised or not, seeing that the

old order of things, Judaism, had been “done away” (2Co 3:7)! Who would complain at the absence of the stars, when the sun was shining in its meridian splendour?

With unmistakable wisdom from on High, Paul wove into the texture of his personal vindication a lovely picture of the various respects in which Christianity excelled Judaism. The one was founded upon what was written on “the tables of stone” (Deu 9:9) and the ceremonial law which accompanied the same; the other is rendered valid and vital by “the Spirit of the living God” writing in “fleshy tables of the heart” (2Co 3:3). The one was “of the letter” which “killeth”; the other “of the spirit” which “giveth life” (2Co 3:6), those expressions denoting the leading characteristics of the two covenants or economies—compare Romans 7:6. Judaism is likened unto “the letter,” because it was something external and objective, for it presented a rule of divine duty, though it conveyed neither disposition nor power to obey; Christianity has to do with the soul and is made effectual—Romans 1:16. “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 was therefore letter, the other spirit” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878).

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, the apostle contrasts the *ministrations* of the two dispensations or economies. It is *not*—as the Dispensationalists erroneously teach—that he here opposes Grace (a word never occurring in this chapter!) to the Moral Law, but that Christianity is set over against Judaism. It is a great mistake to suppose that Paul was here speaking of the Ten Commandments as such. Rather, it is the whole Mosaic system which he has in view—“when Moses is *read*” (2Co 3:15), the reference is primarily to the *ceremonial* law, wherein there was much that pointed forward to Christ and typified His work of redemption, but which, because of their carnality, the Jews discerned not. Judaism was a “ministration of death” (2Co 3:7)—the Moral Law is designed to slay all self-righteousness, for it condemns, and brings in the whole world guilty before God, thereby revealing the sinner’s dire need of salvation. The ceremonial law with its priesthood and ritual likewise exhibited both the guilt and pollution of man, as well as the ineffable holiness and inexorable justice of God, so that without shedding of blood is no remission. The brazen altar in the outer court, where the sacrificial victims were slain, testified loudly to this fact that Judaism is “a ministration of *death*.”

Though the ministration of the old covenant was one of “death,” nevertheless, it was “*glorious*” (2Co 3:7). Judaism was not of human invention, but of divine institution. In it there was a solemn and yet glorious revelation of the moral perfections of God. In it there was a wondrous and blessed foreshadowing of the person, office, and work of the Redeemer. In it there was a wise and necessary paving of the way for the introduction and establishment of Christianity. That “glory” was adumbrated on the countenance of the mediator of that covenant (Deu 5:4-5, Gal 3:19) when he returned to the people after speaking with Jehovah in the mount, for the “skin of his face shone” (Exo 34:29-30). That radiance of his features was emblematic of the glory pertaining to the old covenant—and that, in two noticeable respects. First, it was only an *external* one; whereas a glorious work of grace is wrought *within* the beneficiaries of the new covenant. Second, it was but a *transcient* glory, as the quickly-fading brightness of Moses’ face symbolized; whereas that connected with the new covenant is one that “fadeth not away” (1Pe 1:4). Christians, beholding the glory of the Lord, “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18).

Any one who gives an attentive reading to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 should have no difficulty at all in understanding what the apostle was referring to when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “old things are passed away.” First, he tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:7 that the glory connected with the old covenant “was *to be* done away.” But he went further, saying, second, “For if that which *is done away* was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2Co 3:11)—the old economy and its ministry were but temporary and had even then been set aside. The sacrificing of bulls and goats was no longer valid now the Antitype had appeared. Third, in verse 13, he uses still stronger language: “That which is abolished” (2Co 3:13) or “destroyed.” In the former epistle (1Co 13:10), Paul had laid down the maxim that “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away”; so here, he declares the new covenant annulled the old, for that was never designed to have anything more than a transcient existence. The “old things” which are “passed away” (2Co 5:17) are circumcision, the temple ritual, the Levitical priesthood, the whole of the ceremonial law; in a word, Judaism and all that marked it as a system.

In 2 Corinthians 4, the apostle continues the same subject. The “this ministry” of verse 1 is that of “the new testament” [or “covenant”] spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and termed, “the ministration of the spirit” and “of righteousness” (2Co 3:8-9). In 2 Corinthians 3:14, speaking of the great body of the Jewish nation, he said, “but their minds were blinded”; and in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, he declares, “but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world [i.e. Satan, as the director of its religions] hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not.” In 2 Corinthians 3:9-10, he affirmed that while indeed there was a “glory” connected with the old cov-

enant, yet that of the new “excelled” it. Amplification of that is made in 2 Corinthians 4:6. The pillar of the cloud and of fire which guided Israel during their journeyings was but external and temporary, but Jehovah has now “shined in *our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” That inward illumination abides in the believer forever—immeasurably superior are the “new things” which have displaced the old! In 2 Corinthians 4:8-18, the apostle mentioned some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed.

After a characteristic digression in which the apostle described the rich compensations God has provided for His servants—and His people in general (2Co 5:1-10)—he returns to the subject of his ministerial labours, making known the springs from which they issued (2Co 5:11-14). As in chapter 3, when vindicating his apostleship, he had interwoven important doctrinal instruction, so here. First, it should be carefully noted that Paul was still engaged in closing the mouths of his detractors, yea, furnishing his converts with material to silence them (*see* 2Co 5:12), speaking of his adversaries as those who “glory in appearance, and not in heart.” In what follows, he adduces that which could not be gainsaid. “Because we thus judge [or “reason”] that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2Co 5:14)—a most misleading translation, which is corrected in the Revised Version: “One died for all, therefore all died.” It is quite true that those for whom Christ died were spiritually dead, but that is not what is here referred to—their being unregenerate was a fact *without* Christ dying for them! Rather was Paul showing the legal *effect*, or what follows as the consequence of Christ’s having died for them.

“Having judged this, that if one died for all, then the all died” (Bagster’s Interlinear). The apostle there enunciates a theological axiom: it expresses the principle of federal representation. The act of one is, in the sight of the law, the act of all those on whose behalf he transacts. The whole election of grace “died” *judicially* in the death of their Surety. Christ’s death—so far as the claims of the divine Law or the end of the divine government were concerned—is the same as though they had all personally died. “Died” *unto what*? The consequences of their sins, the curse of the Law? Yes, though that is *not* the main thing which is here in view. What then? This, rather that they had “died” to their old standing in the flesh: they no longer had any status in that realm where such distinctions as Jew and Gentile obtained. They had not only died unto sin, but unto all *natural relations*. Death levels all distinctions!

But that is only negative; the apostle goes further and brings in the positive side: “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:15). “That they which live” does not *here* signify those quickened into newness of life by the Spirit, but those who lived *legally* when their Representative came forth from the tomb. It is premier “life” which is in view—that life which the Law awards unto those who have fulfilled all its requirements. It is the legal oneness of Christ and His Church on resurrection-ground. Having borne the curse, they are dead in law; living now through Christ’s resurrection, they cannot but “live unto him” (Luk 20:38), because judicially, they are one with Him. His resurrection was as vicarious as His death, and the same individuals were the objects of both. The pertinency of this reasoning, this blessed truth and fact to the apostle’s case should at once be apparent. Christ’s own relation to Judaism terminated at His death, and when He came forth from the grave, it was onto resurrection—entirely *new*—ground; and thus it is with all those He legally represented.

What has just been pointed out above is made yet clearer in 2 Corinthians 5:16, where the apostle shows the conclusion which must be drawn from what he had just proved: “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more.” To know a man after the flesh is to own him according to his *natural state*, his racial distinction. To know Christ “after the flesh” was to approve Him as the “seed of David” (Rom 1:3), the Jewish Messiah. But the death of Christ annulled such relations: His resurrection brought Him a new and higher relationship. Therefore, in the exercise of his ministry, Paul showed no respect to a man merely because he was a Jew, nor did he esteem Christ on account of His being the Son of David—rather did he adore Him as being the Saviour of Jew and Gentile alike. Thus, the sinful partiality of those who were seeking to Judaize the Corinthian saints was conclusively exposed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states the grand conclusion to be drawn from what has been established in the context. (*D.V., continued in the November issue*). (*A friend has kindly sent us his Gill’s Commentaries.*)

CONFESSION OF SIN

The holiest man on earth hath cause to confess that he hath sinned. Confession is the duty of the best Christians. While the ship leaks, the pump must not stand still. Confession is a soul-humbling duty, and the best have need of that, for they are in most danger of being lifted up above measure. To preserve us from self-exaltations, the Lord sometimes sends the messenger of Satan to buffet us by temptations, and commands us to buffet ourselves by confessions. Confession affects the heart with sin, and engages the heart against it. Every confession of the evil we do is a new obligation not to do it any more. Confession of sin shows us more clearly our need of mercy, and endears it more to us. How good and sweet is mercy to a soul that hath tasted how evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against the Lord. Confession of sin advances Christ in our hearts. How doth it declare the riches of Christ when we are not afraid to tell Him what infinite sums of debt we are in, which He only, and He easily, can discharge! How it doth commend the healing virtue of His blood when we open to Him such mortal wounds and sicknesses which He only, and He easily, can cure! Woe to be those who commit sin aboundingly that grace may abound, but it is our duty to confess sin aboundingly that grace may abound.

Sincere confession of sin makes the soul very active about the remedies of sin. “I have sinned” said Job; his next word is, “What shall I do unto thee?” (Job 7:20). Many make confession of sin who are never troubled about the cure of it; nay, it may be their next action is to sin over the same sin they have confessed. When the Jews heard of the foulness of their sin in crucifying Christ and the sadness of their condition, they also asked, “What shall we do?” (Act 2:37). A soul truly sensible of sin is ready to submit to any terms which God shall put upon him: “What shall I do?”—I am ready to accept them. That was the sense of the Jews’ question in Acts 2:37: Show us the way, let it be what it will; we will not pick and chose. So too when the Jailor found himself in the bonds of iniquity, he was ready to enter into any bonds of duty.

God is to be consulted and inquired after in all doubtful cases, especially in our sin-cases. “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (Job 7:20). He calls upon God to know what course he should take. Though when we have opportunity to speak unto men, that is good and a duty; yet we must not rest in the counsels of men what to do in sin-cases—God must be consulted.—*Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), 1645.*

NOVEMBER

THE PRECEPTS AND UNDERSTANDING

“A man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels” (Pro 1:5). “Understanding shall keep thee” (Pro 2:11). “He that keepeth understanding shall find good” (Pro 19:8). “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!...Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it” (Pro 16:16, 22). Do we *really* believe those statements? Re-read them slowly, and then answer our question. If we *did*, would we not more earnestly and diligently seek to respond to that injunction “with all thy getting get *understanding*” (Pro 4:7)? But what is meant by “understanding” in these passages? Not book learning or intellectual instruction, for there are many educated fools. Rather, holy prudence, spiritual knowledge, pious discernment and intuition, godly wisdom. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Pro 9:10). “He that followeth vain persons is void of understanding” (Pro 12:11). “He that heareth reproof getteth understanding” (Pro 15:32). “They that seek the LORD understand all things” (Pro 28:5).

How many of the Lord’s people there are who feel that to a large extent, they are *lacking* such understanding. How often are they conscious of being wanting in spiritual discernment, that the eyes of their hearts are defective in

vision. They deplore the foolish mistakes which they so frequently make and wish they had “good judgment.” Now the Word of God makes known how that lack *may be* supplied and that defect remedied—and in language so plain and simple that the unlettered can grasp it—and points to an antidote which is not beyond the reach of the poor and untalented. “The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:8). “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Pro 6:23). “A good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Psa 111:10). “Through thy precepts I get understanding” (Psa 119:104). And again we ask, do we really believe those statements? It is by making the divine precepts the regulators of our character and conduct, that clear vision, holy wisdom, and a good judgment become our portion.

By nature, our understanding is darkened (Eph 4:18), and just so far as the Christian is regulated by his fleshly inclinations is his judgment clouded. Sin blinds and deceives, and we are only delivered from its obscuring and deluding effects to the extent that we are governed by God’s precepts. It is not only wise to obey them, but we become wiser in so doing. It is only as we are in practical subjection to the divine Law that the clouds produced by our lusts and passions are dispelled, and we are able to see clearly. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20); and therefore, it is by its precepts we are prepared to understand and appreciate the Gospel, as it is by the precepts of the Gospel we learn our need of drawing upon the fulness there is in Christ for His people. There is not only pleasure for the soul to be found in walking in the Law of the Lord, but profit as well. Obedience to the divine will begets wisdom of heart. The way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious of practical holiness, thereby we learn to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding” (Psa 119:104). 1. *Of the divine character.* Those precepts are not only expressions of God’s will, but also of His wisdom. They are not only mandates of His authority, but manifestations of His moral perfections too. As we ponder the substance and nature of those precepts we the better perceive the spirituality, the goodness, the righteousness, the holiness of their Author. The perfections of God shine forth through His precepts. They reveal His benevolence and benignity, His solicitude for the welfare of His people, for the keeping of those precepts is not only for His glory, but our good. We do but forsake our own mercies when we ignore them. “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12); and the more we meditate upon it and submit to its requirements, the more do we apprehend the excellency of Him who gave it to us.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding.” 2. *Of the divine will.* It is to our shame if we find ourselves in darkness, for God has graciously provided a Lamp unto our feet and a Light unto our path (Psa 119:105). We should therefore reproach ourselves unsparingly if we are in doubt as to what God would have us do in any given situation. Professing Christians speak of being uncertain as to what is God’s “will” or “mind” for them, and ask how they may know when they are being “divinely guided”? Why, He has already furnished us in His blessed Word with all the guidance we can ever need. His precepts are for the directing of our ways and ordering of all our actions. Those precepts are most comprehensive in their scope and cover every aspect of our varied life. Just so far as we “do his commandments” shall we have “good understanding” (Psa 111:10) and sound judgment for dealing with every problem and decision confronting us.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding.” 3. *Of myself.* It is only as the Christian begins to apprehend the spirituality and strictness of the precepts and resolutely endeavours to be inwardly and outwardly conformed to their holy requirements, that he discovers how thoroughly depraved he is. As the performing of some laborious work reveals the unfitness for it of one not accustomed to use his muscles, so an honest attempt to please God in all things will show how much disinclination there is in one who has lived only to gratify lust. This will cause him to cry, “Teach me thy statutes” (Psa 119:12)—in their application to all the details of my life, and *how to render* full and joyous obedience to them.

4. Understanding of *Satan’s “devices”* (2Co 2:11). The more sincerely and closely we seek to walk with God, the more will our Enemy oppose and endeavour to hinder us, but with evil suggestions within and subtle temptations from without. Nor should we be surprised at this, for it is by treading the path of obedience that we avoid those snares which he has set for our souls. Hence, it is that he puts forth every effort to deter us *from* treading that path and tries his utmost to sidetrack us. The one who constantly and conscientiously seeks to keep God’s precepts will learn more of Satan’s devices in a practical and experimental way than he can from reading a dozen books on the subject—for he will now have a first-hand acquaintance with them.

5. Understanding of *what to pray for*. The one who is determined at all costs to order his life by the divine precepts will need no manual on devotion or prayers made by men to help him—for his own felt needs will prompt his petitions. The difficulties he encounters both from within and without will drive him frequently to the Throne of Grace, that there he may obtain mercy for past failures and grace to help for present emergencies. Nor will he make the long-winded prayers so often heard in public; rather, will he find the breathings of this very Psalm exactly suit-

ed to his case and cry, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments...Incline my heart unto thy testimonies...Teach me good judgment...quicken me, O LORD...Order my steps in thy word” (Psa 119:35, 36, 66, 107, 133).

6. Understanding of *our fellows*. If we be strict ourselves, we shall soon discover those who are lax. If we follow on to know the Lord, we shall quickly learn who are the ones that help and encourage us to walk in the way of holiness, and who are the ones that—by their vain conversation and conformity to this world—would hinder us. By the application of this one test, empty professors will stand exposed before our eyes, for by their fruits, we shall know them. In God’s light, we see light: we discern not only what we are, but what others are. If by grace we press forward along the Narrow Way, it will not be long before we perceive that there are but “few” who have really found it (Mat 7:14).

7. Understanding of *the true secret of happiness*. Though it may occasion real grief to break away from old acquaintances and “turn away” from empty professors (2Ti 3:5), we shall find right compensation in delighting ourselves in the Lord. In keeping God’s precepts, “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11): a peace the world cannot give, and a joy it cannot take away; a tranquil mind, a conscience which torments us not, the smile of God upon us, and His ear open to our petitions. Then it is that we prove for ourselves that Wisdom’s ways “are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are “peace” (Pro 3:17), and that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

Sin and wretchedness are inseparable, for God will not suffer any who revolt against Him to have anything but misery for their portion. Contrariwise, obedience and happiness go together, for we are ever the gainers by submitting our wills to God.

From what has been set forth above, it should appear how greatly they are the losers who blindly follow a one-sided preaching which confines itself to either doctrinal discourses—or to what are termed “experimental” sermons—to the utter neglect of the *practical* side of the Truth. We beg those who have made far more of the divine promises than they have of God’s *precepts* to thoughtfully re-read this article and turn it into prayer. “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Psa 119:2).

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

35. Philippians 1:8-11, Part 3 (1:10)

Ere turning unto the next clause, we should look more definitely at the twofold meaning of “try things that differ” and “approve things that are excellent” (Phi 1:10). The attentive reader will observe how this twofoldness of thought meets us at every turn. First, the apostle had prayed that the love of these saints “may abound yet more and more in [1] knowledge and [2] in all judgment” (Phi 1:9). Next, we saw that the Greek word rendered “judgment” also carries in it the meaning of “sense”; and as it is “*all sense*,” therefore, “*senses*” as in Hebrews 5:14. Then we pointed out that the effect of that petition being answered would be their being enabled to “try” and “approve” things: that twofold significance of *dokimazo* corresponding to and being in perfect opposition with the two things prayed for in the previous verse—“knowledge” being needed in order to test and try, and spiritual “senses” to prove and approve. And now, we find that the objects of those actions may be translated “things that differ” or/and “things that are excellent”—the former linking with to “try”; and the latter, answering better to “approve.” *Diaphero* is rendered, “one star *differeth from* another star in glory” (1Co 15:41), and “ye are of *more value* than many sparrows” (Mat 10:31).

That for which the apostle prayed was their love might be so informed and their understanding so guided by spiritual judgment and sense that upon all occasions, they would be able to distinguish between truth and error in doctrine; that on controverted points wherein there is often aptness to mislead and deceive by means of a resemblance or likeness, yet when each side of the case has been presented, they may, after weighing both, be able to say, “*This is the truth*,” and to approve of it. And in all matters of practice, in cases of conscience or where courses of duty are concerned, amid all the vicissitudes and perplexities of life, they might be able to rightly discern and judge, and to see and say, “*This is my path*,” and that they might know this clearly so as not to be mistaken or deluded, but

able to act in comfort and confidence, assured that they are doing the will of God. Thus it was predicted of Christ that “the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding” and that this should “make him of quick understanding [or “scent”—margin] in the fear of the LORD” (Isa 11:1-3)—that is, quick-sighted and keen-sensed to discern the difference of things. And in his measure, each Christian is endued with “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9).

But more: Paul desired their judgment would be so equipped that their hearts would approve or savour the goodness and relish the excellency of things spiritual, according to the several degrees of their worth as was best for them. Absolutely, that they might value Christ and all His perfections high above all things and persons worldly, so as to count them but dung in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, as the apostle himself did (Phi 3:8). The children of disobedience despise and reject Christ, seeing in Him no beauty that they should desire Him; but unto those who believe, He is precious (1Pe 2:7), and should become increasingly so. So too the “saints”—rather than the famous, wealthy, and mighty—should be esteemed as “the excellent” of the earth, as they were by David (Psa 16:3) and Christ. Likewise, the things of God’s Law are excellent, and should be prized by us above silver and gold. Relatively, there should be a distinguishing and approving among things spiritual those that are *most* excellent, as “meat” surpasses “milk” (Heb 5:12-14). Thus, we should not only be able to distinguish between one Christian and another who is more spiritual and Christlike, and seek his fellowship, but between one company of professing Christians and another, cleaving unto those who keep nearest to the Word and walk closest to God.

We turn now to examine the second of the reasons why the apostle prayed that the love of the saints should abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment or sense, namely, “that ye may be *sincere*” (Phi 1:10). The Greek word used here occurs nowhere else in the New Testament except in 2 Peter 3:1, where it is rendered, “I stir up your *pure* minds by way of remembrance.” The noun is found in 1 Corinthians 5:8, 2 Corinthians 1:12 and 2:17, where in each instance, it is rendered “sincerity.” Sincerity is the opposite of counterfeit and dishonesty, of pretence and imposture. To be sincere is to be genuine, to be in reality what we are in appearance—frank, true, unfeigned, conscientious. It is one of the characteristic marks which distinguishes the regenerate from empty professors, who, though they may have much light in their heads, yet make no conscience of the integrity of their hearts, and are little exercised about the uprightness of their daily walk. Yet, since sin still indwells the Christian, he needs to be constantly on his guard against dissembling, and judge unsparingly everything in and of himself which savours of unreality. Therefore did Christ warn His disciples (and us) “when thou prayest, thou shalt not be *as* the hypocrites” (Mat 6:5), whose religion is a pose—to obtain the high regard of men.

Albert Barnes (1798-1870) informs us that the Greek word for sincerity in our text properly means, “that which is *judged of in sunshine*, and then that which is clear and manifest. It is that over which there are no clouds, which is not doubtful and dark, and which is pure and bright.” As a rule, we attach little importance to the derivation of Hebrew and Greek words (many of which are most uncertain), greatly preferring to ascertain their significance from the manner and connections in which they are *used* in Holy Writ. But in this instance, the etymology of “*ei-likrines*” is borne out by its force in 2 Corinthians 1:12: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,” for (see Revised Version and the Interlinear) “godly sincerity” is really “the sincerity of God.” The “sincerity of God” means not only the sincerity of which He is the Giver and Author, but whereof He is *Witness*, which may be brought to Him and held up before Him for His scrutiny. The idea expressed is that of John 3:21: “He that doeth truth *cometh to the light*, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Our English word “sincere” is derived from the Latin “sine cera,” which means “without wax”; and the origin of that Latin expression approximates very closely unto the etymology of the Greek word. The ancient Romans had a very delicate and valuable porcelain, exceedingly fragile, and only with much trouble could it be fired without being cracked. Dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling in the cracks that appeared with a specially white wax; but when their ware was held up to the light, the wax was evident, being darker in colour than the porcelain. Thus, it came about that honest dealers marked their ware *sine cera*—“without wax”—it having been sun tested. Hence, this grace of spiritual sincerity is not only the opposite of false pretence, but of unholy mixture. As the apostle said of himself and his companion ministers, “For we are not as many, which *corrupt* the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2Co 2:17), where the words “which corrupt” literally mean “which huckster”—which deceitfully mingle false and worthless articles among the genuine.

Sincerity, then, is opposed to mixture, a mingling together of truth and error, of godliness and worldliness, of loveliness and sin. A sincere person has not assumed Christianity as a mask, but his motives are disinterested and pure, his conduct is free from double dealing and cunning, his words express the real sentiments of his heart. He is one who can bear to have the light turned upon him, the springs of his actions scrutinized by God Himself. He is of one piece through and through, and not a hypocrite who vainly attempts to serve two masters and “make the best of both worlds.” He is not afraid to be tested by the Word, for he is without guile (Psa 32:2) or sham—straightforward and honest in all his dealings. As we have seen, in 2 Corinthians 1:12, sincerity is joined with “simplicity,” which is expressed by, “if therefore thine eye be *single*” (Mat 6:22), where the same word is used. The one with a “single” eye refuses to mix fleshly craftiness with spirituality; he aims *solely* at the pleasing and glorifying of God. Hence, as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) well pointed out: “A sincere heart is a ‘true heart’ (Heb 10:22), an heart genuinely holy, true to God, faithful in all things. A sincere heart is a ‘pure’ one (2Ti 2:22), which worketh out all humours and purgeth itself from all filthiness.”

Now the springs from which sincerity flows are the three things mentioned by Paul in his petition. First, it ariseth from a love to God—which consists not only of the understanding and the affections adoring His perfections, but also of the will’s esteeming *His will* as it is made known in His commandments; and therefore, the apostle prayed that their love might abound yet more and more. Second, it proceeds from knowledge, for the more the understanding be divinely enlightened, and the heart awed by an apprehension of God’s ineffable majesty, the more do we make conscience of approaching Him with a “true heart,” and the more fearful we are of acting hypocritically before Him. It is spiritual ignorance of the true and living God which suffers the unregenerate to suppose they can impose upon Him with mere external performances and bodily postures, while their hearts be alienated from Him; hence, the apostle prayed that love might abound “in knowledge.” Third, it issues from that sense or taste which the believer has of the blessedness of walking with God and communing with Him, and from proving for himself the excellency and sweetness of His Word, so that he declares, “O how love I thy law” (Psa 119:97). Thus, the apostle added that their love might abound in knowledge and in “all sense.”

As 2 Corinthians 1:12 intimates, sincerity has special reference to the eyes of the heart being fixed upon God in all that we do. It is—to use again the language of T. Goodwin—“a sound constitution of spirit, both towards God and the commandments of God in walking with Him.” It was unto such sincerity or soundness of spirit that David referred when he said, “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine *integrity*” (Psa 26:1). It was unto the same the Lord referred when He said unto Solomon, “And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes...Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom” (1Ki 9:4-5)—if you genuinely aim at and earnestly please Me, and bend your will to My authority. “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (Psa 119:112): It is in just such an inclining of the heart that is thus constant to the divine precepts that sincerity lies. It was to this Job appealed in Job 27:5-6. That patriarch was not referring—as has been so commonly misunderstood—to his acceptance *with* God on the ground of his works, but unto the purity of his motives and the sincerity of his heart *before* God. He knew he was no hypocrite, and could appeal to the Searcher of hearts in proof.

Such sincerity as has been described above constitutes one of the radical differences existing between the truly regenerate and the formalist, for as John Newton (1725-1807) well pointed out in his piece on Simplicity and Sincerity, “It is an essential part of the Christian character.” The natural religionist may be very diligent and regular in performing his devotions and very careful in making clean “the outside of the cup and of the platter” (Mat 23:25), but he takes no stock of what passes *within* himself. A slave may do just as much for his master as the child of that master does for his dear father; yea, because of his superior strength and skill, the former may do much more than the latter, yet there is a vast difference as to the affection with which and the *end* for which those two work—but that is inward and invisible! So too the service rendered by an unregenerate employee and another possessing godly sincerity: the latter will heed that injunction, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ [serving *Him* in it]; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:5-6)—as appointed by Him and performed conscientiously unto Him.

Sincerity is found principally in *the will*: as it respects sin, in refusing evil; as it respects holiness, in choosing the good. Where the will be savingly sanctified, it gives God the pre-eminence—making ease, credit, pleasures, profits, honours, relations, and aspirations all stoop to Him. It is much, very much, when we can solemnly appeal to

this grace before God Himself. That is what Hezekiah did when (in those little-understood words of his) he said, “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth [reality, knowing Thine eye was ever upon me] and with a perfect [upright or sincere] heart” (2Ki 20:3)—men may misinterpret my motives and misjudge my intentions, but *Thou* knowest all the springs of my actions. When we are not afraid to come to the light (Isa 60:3) and have our innermost desires and designs examined by the Holy One, we may know that we have responded to His just call and claim, “Son, give me thine *heart*” (Pro 23:26). Thus, Peter—despite his terrible fall and after his sincere repentance—could unhesitatingly say to the Searcher of hearts, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (Joh 21:17)—that was not a presumptuous boast, but a plain statement of fact.

Sincerity, then, eyes the *omniscience* of God, and knowing that He cannot be imposed upon, acts accordingly. It is exercised and manifested in such ways as these. By making conscience of *sinful thoughts* and imaginations, which—though hidden from the sight of our fellows—are “naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Therefore, a sincere or upright soul prays and strives against them, mourns over and confesses the same; and if the reader be a stranger to such experiences, then his religion is worthless and his profession as empty as a drum. The sincere soul will not allow himself in *secret sins*, although the thickest curtains of night and darkness be drawn about him, He dare not—for he knows that “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3); and when his lusts gain a temporary mastery so far from excusing himself, he abhors himself, and with a broken heart, acknowledges his faults before God. The sincere soul will make conscience against the performing of holy duties *coldly* and mechanically, afraid to mock the Omniscient One with empty words and with the feigned reverence of outward postures.

It is in just such things as we have mentioned above that vital godliness chiefly consists: in the things of the *heart*. Alas, that the great majority of God’s own people receive no instruction upon such matters today, either from the pulpit or the religious magazines. Alas, that there is now so little to search out and expose an empty profession. Instead, nominal Christians are bolstered up with the idea that so long as they are orthodox in their beliefs, attend to their church duties and lead respectable lives, all is well with them, no matter what may be the state of their hearts in the sight of God. A sincere soul is not occupied with how much time he spends in prayer, but *how real* and genuine his prayer is. He makes conscience of the *spirituality* of his worship. Thus Paul said, “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit” (Rom 1:9)—not in mere external rites. To the hypocrites Christ said, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; *but their heart* is far from me”; and therefore, did He add, “in vain they do worship *me*” (Mat 15:8-9) Who looketh on the heart. Sincerity makes conscience of the *inward* part of our worship and service. Sincerity is the salt which alone savours any of our sacrifices; where that be lacking, they are an offence unto God, because of our play-acting therein.

We must pass on now to the third of the reasons by which the apostle supported his request: “That ye may be sincere, and *without offence* till the day of Christ” (Phi 1:10). The Greek word here rendered “offence” means to walk without stumbling. Thus, as “sincerity” has reference to the integrity of the heart, “offence” looks principally to the external conduct. As T. Goodwin defines the term, “It is put properly to signify the errings, mistreadings, stumblings, and bruising of the feet in walking.” To which he added, “As afore in that of sincerity, the intention of the mind was compared to the eye (‘if thine eye be single’), so this hath allusion to the steps.” As we feel unable to improve upon T. Goodwin’s outline, we will avail ourselves of the same, using our own language, more or less, in filling it in. First, to walk without offence is to carefully avoid those ways and works before believers as may induce them to sin, or such as we know would prove an occasion unto others of stumbling, or that would strengthen and confirm the wicked in their corruptions. It is in this manner the same word is used in 1 Corinthians 10:32: “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God”—that which occasioned scandal must be sedulously avoided. We must never by our example invite others to follow us in evil.

Second, to walk “without offence” is to abstain from every action which would be contrary to the light which the Christian has received from God and the principles which he professes before others. A case of failure in this particular respect is found in Galatians 2, where Peter “withdrew and separated himself” from the Gentile saints, “fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12). Such conduct was reprehensible, and Paul “withstood him to the face,” for said he, “they walked not *uprightly*” (Gal 2:14). Literally, the Greek means, “they walked not with a right foot.” It squared not with the Rule God had given, and therefore, he added, “not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel.” Peter had been the first to receive a divine revelation, by means of a vision from heaven (Act 10), that he must not regard the Gentile saints as unclean, and refuse to eat with them. But the fear of man

brought a snare, and caused him to walk contrary to the light God had vouchsafed him, and thereby stumble the Gentile believers—which was the very reverse of being “without offence,” as Philippians 1:10 speaks. Peter’s failure here is recorded as a case for us to solemnly take unto heart.

Third, to walk “without offence” goes even further than the maintaining of a blameless conversation or conduct before men, including as it does a blameless conscience *before God*. This is clear from Acts 24:16 where the apostle again used the same term: “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience *void of offence* toward God, and toward men.” T. Goodwin suggests that the “I exercise myself” is “a little too low and flat to reach the emphasis of the original,” preferring “unto this do I give up myself” or “devote myself as the main study and design of my life and soul.” He resolved that there should be nothing in his behaviour which could occasion accusation of conscience before God. Paul’s conscience had received more light into it than any man’s then living in the world; and therefore, he had the hardest task to walk up to that light, and needed to give the more thought and diligence in managing every action and the circumstances of it. He endeavoured to so conduct himself that there might not be a single dark spot in his conscience, that there might be no act of spirit converse to that light which shined in his soul, nothing that would cast any shadow upon it. That he succeeded therein is clear from 2 Corinthians 1:12, and that he prayed for the same experience in the saints is evident from our text; and therefore, with nothing short of that, should we be satisfied.

To live “without offence” does not mean to be sinless—for that would contradict James 3:2, 1 John 1:8; but it means to refrain from everything which occasions others to sin, to do no action contrary to the light we have received from God, and to avoid everything which would issue in a guilty conscience before Him. That is indeed a high standard of conduct, yet at nothing short of it must we aim. It is the highest realisable in this life, approximating closest to perfection outwardly. That it is, by the grace of God, attainable, appears from the case of the parents of John the Baptist, of whom we are told, “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*” (Luk 1:6)—though not “sinless.” So too the apostle Paul declared, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Act 23:1): I am not conscious of any action against the light. As T. Goodwin says, “If a holy man is often kept from such sins a week, a month, a year, then it is also possible, in this state of frailty, to be kept all his lifetime.”

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

15. The Jordan (3:1-2)

The long season of preparation had reached its close, and the arduous task confronting Israel must now be tackled. The forty years they had spent in the wilderness requires to be viewed from a twofold standpoint. First, it was a divine judgment on the adult generation, which—after being so graciously brought out of Egypt and so gloriously delivered at the Red Sea—gave way to an evil heart of unbelief, baulking at the prospect of conquering Canaan (Num 13:28-33) and resolving to “return into Egypt” (Num 14:1-4), whose carcasses fell in the wilderness (1Co 10:5, 10; Heb 3:8-17). Second, it was a training for the younger generation who were to occupy the land of promise. This has not been sufficiently recognised. During that forty years, many sons and daughters had been born, and *they* were given to behold the wonders of the Lord in a manner and to an extent which no other generation ever has. Not only was there a visible display of Jehovah’s faithfulness and power before their eyes in sustaining such a vast number by a daily supply of food from Heaven, but at the close, Moses could say, “Your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot” (Deu 29:5).

And is not this ever the Lord’s way with His people? He does not bid them to trust in Him with all their hearts and lean not unto their own understandings, until He has given them clear proof that He is fully worthy of their confidence. He does not call upon them to overcome the world, mortify their lusts, and resist the devil, until He has strengthened them with might by His Spirit in the inner man. He does not exhort them to tread that path of “much tribulation” (Act 14:22) which alone conducts to Glory, without first weaning their hearts from this world, giving a death wound to their love of sin, and vouchsafing them a ravishing earnest of that glory. How gracious is the Lord

and how tender are His ways! He does not quench the smoking flax (Isa 42:3; Mat 12:20), but feeds the spark of grace with the oil of His Spirit. He carries the lambs in His bosom (Isa 40:11) until they be able to walk. Only a personal and experimental knowledge of Him with whom they have to do will sustain the heart of a saint under the testings and trials to which he must be submitted.

In the same way, the Lord deals with and furnishes His servants. It was thus with Joshua's predecessor. When Jehovah first appeared unto him and made known it was His purpose to employ him in leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, he was fearful; and though the Lord declared He would stretch forth His hand smiting Egypt with all His wonders and giving His people favour in the sight of their oppressors, poor Moses continued to raise objections that Israel would not believe him, nor hearken to his voice. Then the Lord bade him cast his rod on the ground, and it became a serpent; told him to take it by the tail, and it became a rod in his hand; ordered him to thrust his hand into his bosom, and he drew it forth leprous as snow; and when repeating the action, it was made whole (Exo 4:1-4). Thus assured, Moses went forth on his mission. So it was with the Eleven: Before they entered upon their life work and went forth to make disciples of all nations (Mat 28:19), they spent three years with Christ (Mar 3:14)—witnessing His miracles and being instructed by Him.

We have already seen how such was the case with Joshua. First, the Lord had spoken to him after the death of Moses, giving him the most definite and heartening promises for his faith to rest upon (Jos 1:1-6). Then his hands had been strengthened by the ready co-operation of the two and a half tribes whose portion lay on the eastern side of Jordan, vowing, "According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee" (Jos 1:12-18). Next, he had sent forth the two spies to reconnoiter the land, and they—having received a most unlooked-for welcome and assistance from Rahab—had returned and said unto Joshua, "Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Jos 2:24). What more could Israel and their leader want! The Lord had gone before them preparing their ways, causing His "terror" to fall upon the inhabitants (Jos 2:9). With what confidence, then, might Joshua and all the people go forward into their inheritance! And should it not be the same with Christians now? "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him" (Joh 10:4). If our eyes be fixed on Him and our ears respond to His voice, there is nothing to be afraid of.

But we must now turn to the sequel. And what does the reader suppose is the *nature* of it?—A severe testing of faith? Doubtless, that is what many would term it. Personally, we would prefer to say, "A glorious opportunity for exercising faith in the living God." Do not, dear reader, look so much upon painful circumstances and difficult situations as unpleasant trials of faith which have to be endured, but rather, thankfully regard them as golden occasions for you to prove afresh the sufficiency of Him who never fails those who fully trust Him. God gives His people grace not only for the comfort of their hearts, but to use for Him. He has placed His sure promises in the Word not merely for us to wonder at, but to turn unto good account. He grants encouragements along the way and strengthens us that we may press forward and do further exploits in His name. He imparts faith unto His people that they may employ it in a manner honouring to Him. Such it appears to us is, in part, the relation between Joshua 1 and 2 and what is now to be before us. Israel was faced with a most formidable obstacle, but in the view of what God had wrought for them, there was no ground for dismay.

Above, we have said, Such it appears to us is, *in part*, the relation between Joshua 1 and 2 and what is now to be before us. But there is something else, and if we deliberately disregarded it, we should be guilty of handling the Word of God deceitfully and seriously misleading His people. That 'something else' is either blankly repudiated today—by those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness in failing to insist that grace reigns through righteousness (Rom 5:21), teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:11-12); or is ignored by those who studiously omit everything which would be unpalatable to empty professors, well knowing that if they are to receive their support, such must be bolstered up in their worldliness and carnality. These hirelings harp continually on God's grace, His promises, and naught but faith being required by Him; and woefully fail to lay stress upon God's holiness, His precepts, and obedience being indispensably necessary. Joshua 1 and 2, my reader, contains something more than precious promises and gracious encouragements.

Joshua 1 and 2 also make prominent the *claims* of God and strongly enforces human *responsibility*. Let us refresh the reader's memory. First, the Lord had bidden Joshua, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee:...This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous..." (Jos 1:7-8). Thus was the leader himself required to render the most complete subjection unto the revealed will of the Lord, and informed,

that success would hinge thereon. Joshua, in turn, “commanded the officers of the people” (Jos 1:10) what orders to give unto them. Then he pressed upon the two and a half tribes their obligations, bidding them, “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD *commanded* you” (Jos 1:13). It was only in the behalf of a people whose hearts were right with Him and who walked in the way of His precepts that the Lord would show Himself strong. Faith in Him was to be evidenced by obedience unto His commands; no other faith would He own.

It is to be carefully noted that Joshua 3—like Joshua 2—opens with the word “And,” which not only shows the three chapters are closely connected, but also tells us we must carry in our minds what has previously engaged our attention. Joshua and the people, as they started forward on their new venture, must be regulated entirely by the instructions which they had already received. So must we be! And if we are to make a right application of this memorable incident unto ourselves, if we are to draw from it the spiritual lessons which it is designed to teach us, then we need to heed what was before us in the previous sections. A most formidable obstacle lay in Israel’s path: The river Jordan barred their entrance into Canaan, and we are now to behold how that obstacle was surmounted. If we are to make a personal and practical use of this portion of Scripture, that river which intercepted Israel’s progress should be regarded as illustrative of any problem or obstruction which confronts the minister of the Gospel or the ordinary Christian, and then ascertain from this passage what he must do if he is to overcome his difficulty and be enabled to go forward.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning” (Jos 3:1). Observe well that the Holy Spirit has taken due notice of this! Not only so, but He has recorded the same thing again in Joshua 6:12; 7:16; 8:10! In his early rising, as in so many other respects, he foreshadowed the antitypical Joshua, our Saviour—see Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, etc. Joshua’s “early” rising shows that he was not slothful, or a lover of his own ease, but one whose heart was in his work and who diligently applied himself unto the same. Therein, he has left an example for each servant of Christ to follow. The minister of the Gospel is to be no slacker and shirker, but rather “a *workman* that needeth not to be ashamed” (2Ti 2:15). Whether he rises early or (as this writer) finds it more expedient to burn the midnight oil, he is in honour and duty bound to spend at least as many hours in his study each day as does the farmer in his field, the clerk in his office, or the labourer in the factory. He has no warrant to expect God to use him, unless he be industrious and denies himself.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over” (Jos 3:1). Moses had conducted Israel as far as Shittim (Num 25:1); and after his death, it was from there that Joshua had sent out the two spies (Jos 2:1). They had returned to him with their favourable report, and now we behold the sequel. In his “rising early,” Joshua gave proof that he did not shirk the difficult task before him, but was anxious to come to grips with it. The Lord rewarded his diligence by inclining the people to co-operate with him. They might have demurred, saying, “What is the use of leaving this place where we have so long been encamped, and moving forward to Jordan itself, where there are neither bridges nor boats for us to cross over it?” Instead, they laid hold of the promise, “within three days *ye shall* pass over this Jordan (Jos 1:11), and went forward in faith and obedience. They knew not *how* the obstacle was to be overcome, and for the moment, that was none of their business. Their responsibility was to proceed along the path of duty so far as they were able, and count upon God’s continuing to keep that path open for them!

“And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host” (Jos 3:2). At first thought, it seems strange that such a multitude should be left encamped there for this length of time ere a further word was spoken to them, but a little reflection should indicate the Lord’s design therein, and then show us the important lesson *we* should learn therefrom. Ponder this incident; visualise the scene before your mind’s eye. It was not an army of men only, but a vast congregation of men, women, and children—to say nothing of their baggage and herds of animals, and further advance was blocked by the river. Whatever the breadth and depth of the Jordan in recent centuries or today, it is evident that it presented an impassable obstruction in Joshua’s time—moreover, it was *in flood* at that particular season (Jos 3:15); and yet, they were left to gaze upon it for three days, faced with the fact that they had no means of their own for crossing! Why? What was the Lord’s object in this? Was it not to impress Israel more deeply with a realisation of their own utter helplessness? Was it not to shut them up more completely unto Himself?

And is not that, very often, the chief design of God’s providential dealings with us? To bring us to the end of our own resources, to make us conscious of our own insufficiency, by bringing us into a situation from which we cannot extricate ourselves, confronting us with some obstacle which to human wit and might is insurmountable? By nature, we are proud and self-reliant, ignorant of the fact that the arm of flesh is frail. And even when faced with difficulties, we seek to solve them by our own wisdom, or get out of a tight corner by our own efforts. But the Lord is graciously resolved to humble us; and therefore, the difficulties are increased and the corner becomes tighter, and

for a season, we are left to ourselves—as Israel was before the Jordan. It is not until we have duly weighed the difficulty and then discovered we have nothing of our own to place in the opposite scale that we are really brought to realise our impotency, and turn unto Him who alone can undertake for us and free us from our dilemma. But such dull scholars are we that the lesson must be taught us again and yet again before we actually put it into practice.

Those three days before that unfordable river was the necessary preparation for what followed—the background from which the following miracle might be the more evident to and the more appreciated by Israel. Man's extremity furnishes the most suitable opportunity for God to display His power. And it is not until man is made painfully aware of his extremity that he turns unto the Lord and seeks His intervention. That truth is writ large across the 107th Psalm, which forcibly illustrates and exemplifies what we have been seeking to express. "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. *Then* they cried unto the LORD in their trouble" (Psa 107:5-6). "And there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses" (Psa 107:12-13). "They draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the LORD" (Psa 107:18-19). "They...are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble" (Psa 107:27-28). They are brought into a desperate situation to the end of their own resources, and then it is that they—not merely utter a few cold and formal petitions, but—"cry unto the LORD"; and such a cry is ever responded to by His deliverance.

Ah, my reader, do not close your eyes to the Jordan—the problem, the difficulty, the obstacle—that confronts you, but face it. Do not attempt to minimise it, but take its full measure. Continue contemplating it until you plainly realise your own helplessness to cope with the same, and then trustfully turn unto Him who is capable of dealing with it. Suppose you be a minister of the Gospel, and you yearn for your hearers to be saved: Is there not an insuperable obstacle standing in the way of the realisation of your desire? Indeed, there is: The stolid indifference and unresponsiveness of your hearers. *That* is the "Jordan" which confronts you: The spiritual insensibility of your congregation—and "Jordan" is the symbol of *death*! Do you fully realise that?—that your hearers have no more spiritual life in them than the waters of that river had? That you can no more open their hearts to the reception of the Gospel than Israel could open a path through the Jordan? Are you acting accordingly? Few ministers, few churches today are! When they would have a "revival," they hire an outside evangelist and count on special singing, instead of crying unto the Lord.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

12b. Its Responsibilities

It might be thought that we had pretty well covered this aspect of our subject in the preceding section. Not so; there is another important phase of it which needs to be considered. Sin has not only alienated man from God, but man from man as well. Where there is no love to God, there is no genuine love to our fellow-men. By nature, we are totally depraved; and as such, possessed of a radically selfish, evil, malicious disposition. "The poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom 3:13-16). The record of human history consists largely of a solemn demonstration of that fact. Envy and enmities have marked the relationships of one nation to another, one party against another, one individual against another. Frictions and feuds have been the inevitable outcome of a covetous and ferocious spirit among men—were they black or white, red or yellow.

It is only the restraining hand of God which holds men within bounds and prevents the social sphere from becoming worse than the jungle. Every once in a while that restraining Hand is largely withdrawn; and then, despite all our vaunted progress, human nature is seen in its naked savagery. The truth is that men today are neither better nor worse than they were at the beginning of this Christian era. Speaking of God's own people during their unregeneracy, the apostle described them as "serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and *hating one another*" (Titus 3:3). Such are men the world over, though they will not own up to it, nor can they be expected to. Since the natural man is ignorant of his inherent and inveterate enmity against God, it is not to be supposed that he is aware of harbouring such a spirit against his neighbours. But if all the police were removed from this so-called civilised country, how long would it be before "hateful and hating one another" was plainly and generally manifested!

Fallen man not only requires to be reconciled to God, but to his fellows; and where the one takes place, the other necessarily follows. Reconciliation, as was shown, is one of the fruits of regeneration, for at the new birth, a new principle is imparted to its subject, so that his enmity is displaced by amity: "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1Jo 5:1). The reconciliation of a soul to God entails his reconciliation to all saints. Since God has been reconciled to the entire Church (considered as fallen), and its two main constituents (believing Jews and Gentiles) are made one, it follows that each Christian is, fundamentally, harmoniously united to all others. We say "fundamentally," for the work of Christ has federally and legally united them. But that is not all: He procured the Spirit for His Church and He—by the work of regeneration—makes them vitally one in a new creation. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1Co 12:13).

As the Christian's reconciliation to God entails certain clearly-marked responsibilities, so also does his reconciliation to all fellow-believers, and these are what we shall now be occupied with. Let us begin with that basic and comprehensive duty, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Concerning that simple precept, there has been much confusion—both as to its meaning and requirement—with almost endless controversy about church-union and divisions. Man, with his usual perversity, has changed that exhortation to "zealously attempt to make and enforce a human unity," anathematizing all who will not subscribe and conform unto the same. Romanists have made the greatest outcry about church unity, vehemently contending that it is indispensably necessary that all Christians should submit to the papal authority, and that there is no salvation for anyone dying outside their communion. Thus, a visible and carnal union with an Italian pontiff is preferred to an invisible, spiritual, and saving union with the Christ of God.

We do not propose to canvass now the various efforts and devices of men since the Reformation to bring into existence organizations for unity and uniformity among professing Christians, but in creed and form of worship, such as State Churches "by law established," denominations which have laid claim to being the "true Church" or "churches of Christ"; nor the high pretensions of those who rather more than a century ago denounced all sects and systems and alleged that they alone met on "the ground of Christ's Body" and "expressed" the unity of the Spirit—only to split up in a very short time into numerous factions and conflicting "fellowships." No, our object here is not to be controversial, but constructive; to give a brief exposition of Ephesians 4:1-6; and then point out the practical application and bearing of the same. We cannot intelligently "keep the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3) until we rightly understand what that "unity" is. May He graciously be our Guide.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,...Endeavouring to keep," etc. (Eph 4:1-3). That exhortation holds the same place in this epistle as does Romans 12:1, being placed at the forefront of the hortatory section; and we at once observe the verbal resemblances between them in the "therefore" by which it is supported, and the "I beseech you"—the earnestness with which the call is made. Standing as it does at the beginning of the practical division of the epistle, taking precedence of all its other precepts, we have emphasized its deep importance. It was written by the apostle during his incarceration at Rome, but it is blessed to mark that he looked above Caesar, regarding himself as "the prisoner of *the Lord*" (Eph 4:1). Hence, we find his heart was occupied not with his own danger or discomfort, but with the glory of Christ and the interests of His redeemed. He asked not the saints to "get up a petition" for his release, nor even to pray for it, but was concerned that they should conduct themselves in a way which would bring glory to his Master.

The "I therefore,...beseech you that ye walk worthy...Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-4) requires that we carefully consult what precedes, for it is the contents of Ephesians 1-3 which explains the force of Ephesians 4:1, 3. First, it should be pointed out that the Greek word rendered "bond" is not the simple "desmos," but rather the compound "sun-desmos"—*joining*—bond. This at once links up with and is based upon the "*fellow-citizens*" of Ephesians 2:19, the being "*fitly framed together*" and "*builded together*" (Eph 2:21-22), and the "*fellow-heirs, and a joint-body, and joint-partakers of His promise*" (Eph 3:6—Greek)—where, in each case, the reference is to the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in the mystical Body of Christ. It is therefore an affectionate plea that those—who in their unregenerate days, had been bitterly hostile against each other—should now walk together in love and harmony. The same Greek word occurs in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:14: "And above all these things put on *charity*, which is the [*joint*] bond of perfectness," which throws clear light on the verse we are now considering.

"I therefore...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph 4:1), which is *unto sonship*—holiness and glory, conformity to the image of Christ. The inestimable privileges conferred upon those who are effectually called by God out of darkness into His marvellous light, obligates its favoured recipients to order their lives accordingly. It requires from them a distinctive spirit, a particular disposition and temper, which is to

be exercised and manifested in their dealings with fellow-saints. They are to conduct themselves with humility and gentleness, not with self-assertiveness and self-exaltation. They are required to seek the good and promote the interests of their brethren and sisters in Christ, and continually endeavour to preserve amity and concord among them: "To bear with one another in love as to those light occasions of offence or displeasure which could not be wholly avoided even among believers in this present imperfect state" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

For the Christian to walk worthily of his vocation is for him to live and act congruously, suitably thereto. Here, it has particular reference to the spirit and manner in which he is to *practically* conduct himself toward his fellow-saints—namely, by endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That word, "endeavouring" means far more than a half-hearted effort which ceases as soon as opposition be encountered. It signifies "give diligence"—labouring earnestly, doing our utmost in performing this task. The nature of this duty is intimated with considerable definiteness by the particular graces which are here specified as needing to be exercised. Had that "unity" consisted of uniformity of belief, as many have supposed, then the saints had been exhorted unto the acquirement of "knowledge" and the exercise of "faith." Or had that unity been an ecclesiastical one, which is to be framed or "expressed" on earth, then the call would be to the exercise of "faithfulness" and "firmness" in uncompromisingly resisting all innovations. But instead, it is "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another [*individually!*] in love" (Eph 4:2-3).

Thus, whatever be our angle of approach in seeking to define this controversial expression—whether it be from the contents of the previous chapters, the parallel passage in Colossians 3:14, or the congruity of the preceding verse—it should be clear that the "unity of the Spirit," which we are to diligently assay to keep "in the bond of peace," has no reference to the formation of an external and visible unification of all professing Christians, wherein all differences in judgment and belief are to be dropped and where all worship is to conform to a common standard. The union of Christendom—which so many enthusiasts have advocated—would, in reality, consist of a unity in which principle gave way to policy; contending earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints would be displaced by the uttering of mere generalities and moral platitudes; and the masculine virtues degenerating into an effeminate affection of universal charity. Sheep and goats will never make amicable companions; still less so, sheep and wolves. Variety, and not uniformity, marks all the works of God—whether it be in creation, providence, or grace.

The unity of the Spirit is not an ecclesiastical one here on earth, nor is it one which God will make in Heaven by and by. Nor is it the unity of the mystical body—for *that* can no more be broken than could a bone in the literal body of Christ (Joh 18:36). The very fact that it is "the unity of the *Spirit*" precludes any visible ecclesiastical unity. It is a fact subsisting to faith, without any evidence of it to sight. It is therefore a divine, spiritual, and present unity which is quite imperceptible to the senses; it is that unity of which the Spirit is the Author; it is the new creation of which He makes God's elect members by regeneration. Every soul indwelt by the Spirit is a part of that unity, and none others are. By being made members of the new creation, we are brought into "the joint-bond of peace." Each soul indwelt by the Spirit is inducted into a company where enmity has been slain, in which the members are united as the fruit of Christ's sacrifice; and they are here enjoined to act in full harmony with this new relationship.

By virtue of his having the Spirit, each Christian is in spirit united with all other regenerated souls; and he is to give diligence in practically observing that fact in all his converse and dealings with them. He is to earnestly avoid falling out with a brother or sister in Christ, being most careful to eschew everything having a tendency to cause a breach between them. He is to love all in whom he can discern any of the features of Christ, whether or not they belong to his own "church" or "assembly." He is to exercise good will unto all who are members of the Household of Faith. He should be slow to take offence, and having himself received mercy, should ever be merciful unto others. God's reconciliation should be our rule in dealing with our brethren: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (1Jo 4:11); and since His heart embraces the whole of His family, ours should do no less. If He be longsuffering to usward, we should be longsuffering to themward. "Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children" (Eph 5:1).

Now the only possible way in which the reconciled soul can discharge this essential and blessed part of his responsibility is by exercising those graces enjoined in Ephesians 4:2. After beseeching the saints to walk worthy of their vocation, Paul at once described the necessary qualifications for so doing, namely, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph 4:2). Lowliness of mind or humility is to have a mean estimate of myself, based upon the consciousness of my sinfulness and weakness. Let it be most attentively noted that the exercise of *this* grace comes first; and that it is not only "with lowliness," but "with *all* lowliness"—nothing so hinders our keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as personal pride. Next comes "meekness," which signifies tractability, gentleness, mildness; an unresisting and uncomplaining temper. It is that

lamb-like disposition which enables one to bear injury from others without bitterness and retaliating in a spirit of revenge. “Forbearing one another in love”: Suppressing anger and ill feeling, patiently enduring the failings, foibles, and faults of my brethren, as they do (or should) mine.

Those graces of humility, meekness, and longsuffering are to be manifested in *keeping*—recognising and cherishing—that spiritual and invisible unity which there is between the children of God, loving all in whom they perceive His image, doing everything in their power to further one another’s interests, and to promote harmony and concord. For the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and the good of His people, each believer is under bonds to exercise and manifest a spirit of good will unto his brethren: That is to override all natural peculiarities, all selfish interests, all party concerns. That does not mean a peace at any price, wherein we connive at error or condone the sins of an erring saint, making no effort to recover him. No, indeed, the wisdom which is from above is “first pure, then peaceable” (Jam 3:17). If we perceive a professing Christian walking contrary to the Truth, we are to have no intimate fellowship with him, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2Th 3:15); if he be suddenly overtaken in a fault, we should—in the spirit of meekness—seek to restore him (Gal 6:1).

Rightly did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out that, “The seat of Christian unity is the heart or spirit; it does not lie in one set of thoughts and form or mode of worship, but in one heart or soul.” In other words, it lies in the exercise of a gracious and peaceable disposition. As that writer so aptly pointed out, “*Love* is the law of Christ’s kingdom, the lesson of His school, and the livery of His family.” If Christ be the Prince of Peace, then surely His disciples ought to be the children of peace, ever striving to maintain amity and harmony. The root cause of strife and dissension lies not in anything external, but within ourselves: “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jam 4:1). We should not rudely obtrude our ideas upon others, but rather wait until we are asked to state our views, and then do so with meekness and reverence (1Pe 3:15). The cultivation of an amiable disposition and peaceable temper is the best cement for binding saints together.

In Ephesians 4:4-6, the apostle mentions several motives to prompt unto a compliance with the duty expressed in Ephesians 4:1, 3: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Eph 4:4). What better grounds could believers have to love and act peaceably toward each other! They are fellow-members of the mystical body of Christ, they are indwelt by the same blessed Spirit, they are begotten unto the same glorious and eternal inheritance. Do they look forward to the time when they shall join “the spirits of just men made perfect”?—then let them anticipate that time and act now agreeably thereto toward those they hope to dwell together with forever. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5): There may be different apprehensions of that Faith, different degrees of conformity to that Lord, different understandings of “baptism,” but that must not alienate the heart of one Christian from another. “One God and Father of all” (Eph 4:6), whose family all the reconciled belong to; and should not the members of that family cherish one another! Let that sevenfold consideration animate each of us to live in peace and brotherly affection with our fellow-saints.

The unity of the Spirit differs from the oneness of the Body, in that while we may either keep or break the former, we can do neither the one nor the other with the latter. The responsibility of those reconciled to each other is, negatively, to avoid anything which would mar that unity; and positively, to engage in everything that would further it. Pride, self-will, envy, bigotry, fleshly zeal about comparative trifles, are the causes of most of the frictions and factions among believers. “Only *by pride* cometh contention” (Pro 13:10): That is the most fertile root of all—offence is taken because I do not receive that notice to which I deem myself entitled; or I am hurt because I cannot have my own way in everything. “A whisperer separateth chief friends” (Pro 16:28)—but he can only do so by one *giving ear* to his malicious tales! An acquaintance of ours used to say unto those who came to her with evil reports of others, “Please take your garbage elsewhere: I decline to receive it.”

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Mat 5:23-24). How emphatically that makes manifest the importance which God attaches to our keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! When that unity has been broken, He desires not our gifts: If you have done a brother an injury, and he has just cause of complaint, peace has been disrupted, and the Holy One requires you to right that wrong *before* He will receive your worship. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:18). God is as much the Father of the offended one as He is of you; and He will receive naught at your hand, until you remove that stumblingstone from before your brother. No worship or service can possibly be acceptable to God while I cherish a malicious spirit toward any of His children.

When a minister of the Church of England gives notice of an approaching “Holy Communion,” he is required to read unto those expecting to participate from an exhortation containing these words: “And if ye shall perceive

your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile yourself unto them; being ready to make restitution and satisfaction, according to the uttermost of your power, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other; and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you, as ye would have forgiveness of your offence at God's hand: for otherwise, the receiving of the Holy Communion doth naught else than increase your damnation." Alas, that there is so little of such plain and faithful warning in most sections of Christendom today; and that Christ is so often insulted by His "Supper" being celebrated in places where bitter feelings are cherished and breaches exist between the celebrants.

The following precepts are so many illustrations of Ephesians 4:3, and so many branches of the responsibility saintwards of each reconciled soul. "Have peace *one with another*" (Mar 9:50). "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet...love one another" (Joh 13:14, 34). "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10). "Admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). "By love serve one another...Bear ye one another's burdens" (Gal 5:13; 6:2). "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32). "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phi 2:3). "Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another" (1Th 5:11). "Exhort one another...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb 3:13; 10:24). "Speak not evil one of another" (Jam 4:11). "Use hospitality one to another...all of you be subject one to another" (1Pe 4:9; 5:5).

THE GREAT CHANGE

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17). Familiar as are those words to most of our readers, simple and plain as their meaning appears to be; yet like almost every verse in the Epistles, this one can only be rightly understood by ascertaining its connection with the context. Nay, we go further: Unless this verse be interpreted in strict accord with its setting, we are certain to err in our apprehension of it. The very fact that it is introduced with "therefore" shows it is inseparably connected with what goes before, that it introduces an inference, or draws a conclusion therefrom; and if we ignore it, we reject the key which alone will open its contents. In our last, we took up the preceding verses, though we by no means attempted to give a full exposition of the same. Our design was simply to supply a sufficient explanation of their terms, as would enable the reader to perceive the apostle's drift. That required us to point out the general conditions prevailing in the Corinthian assembly (so that it might appear *why* Paul wrote to them as he did), and then to indicate the trend of what he said in chapters 3 and 4.

In 2 Corinthians 5:12, the apostle tells them, "For we commend not ourselves again unto you [see 2Co 3:1-2], but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart." Those who gloried in appearance were the Judaizers, who boasted of their lineage from Abraham and of belonging to the Circumcision. In what follows, Paul furnishes his converts with arguments which the false teachers could not answer, employing language which set aside the exclusivism of Judaism. First, he pointed out that "if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all" (2Co 5:14-15). That thrice repeated "all" emphasized the international scope of Christ's federal work: He died as truly on the behalf and in the stead of God's elect among the Gentiles as for the elect Jews, and as verse 15 goes on to show, the one benefits therefrom as much as do the other. The cross of Christ effected and introduced a great change in the kingdom of God. Whatever peculiar position of honour the Jews had previously occupied, whatever special privileges had been theirs under the Mosaic economy, they obtained no longer. The glorious inheritance which Christ purchased was to be the portion of all for whom He endured the curse, and of all for whom He earned the reward of the Law.

Next, the apostle showed the logical inferences which must be drawn forth from what he had established in verses 14-15. First, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more" (2Co 5:16). Notice first the words which we have placed in italics: They are time marks defining the revolutionary transition, calling attention to the great dispensational change, which the redemptive work of Christ had produced. That change consisted of the complete setting aside of the old order of things, which had held sway during the fifteen centuries preceding, under which a fleshly relation had predominated. Christ had ushered in an order of things, wherein such distinctions, as Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, had no virtue and conferred no special privilege. For one who had been redeemed,

it mattered nothing whether his brethren and sisters in Christ were formerly members of the Jewish nation or aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. He knew or esteemed no man according to his natural descent. The true Circumcision are they “which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”—or their genealogy (Phi 3:3).

Not only had the death and resurrection of Christ resulted in the setting aside of Judaism—which was based upon a fleshly descent from Abraham, and whose privileges could only be enjoyed by those bearing in their bodies the covenant sign of circumcision (Judaism being displaced by Christianity, which is based upon a spiritual relation to Christ, the privileges of which are enjoyed by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the sign and seal of the new covenant)—but Christ Himself is now known or esteemed after a different and higher manner. It was as their promised Messiah He had appeared unto the Jews, and it was as such His disciples had believed on Him (Luk 24:21; Joh 1:41, 45). Accordingly, He had bidden His apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat 10:5-6)—contrast Matthew 28:19 after His resurrection! So far from knowing Christ as the Jewish Messiah, they worship Him as exalted above all principality and power. “Jesus Christ *was* a minister of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8), but He is *now* seated “on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the [heavenly] sanctuary” (Heb 8:1-2).

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the apostle draws a further conclusion from what he had stated in verse 15: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”—yes, “any man,” be he a Jew or Gentile. Before we can ascertain the force of “a new creature,” we have to carefully weigh the opening word, for its absence or presence entirely changes the character of the sentence: “If any man be in Christ, he *is* a new creature” is a simple statement of fact, but “therefore if” is a conclusion drawn from something preceding. That one consideration should be sufficient to show our verse is not treating of regeneration, for if it signified “any person who is vitally united to Christ has been born again,” the “therefore” would be entirely superfluous—he either is or he is not a spiritually-quickened soul, and no reasoning, no inference can alter the fact. Or is there anything in the context from which regeneration can be deduced, for the apostle is not treating of the gift and operations of the Spirit, but of the judicial consequences of Christ’s federal work. Instead of describing Christian experience in this 17th verse, Paul is stating one of the *legal effects* which necessarily results from what Christ did for His people.

In 2 Corinthians 5:13 and 14, Christ is set forth as the federal Head of His Church, first in death, then in resurrection. From that doctrinal statement of fact, a twofold inference is pointed. First and negatively (2Co 5:16), those whom Christ represented *died in Him* to their old status or natural standing, so that henceforth, they are no longer influenced by fleshly relationships. Second and positively (2Co 5:17), those whom Christ represented *rose in Him* and were inducted into a new status or spiritual standing. Christ was transacting as the Covenant Head of His people, and He rose as the Head of the new creation (as Adam was the head of the old); and therefore, if I be federally in a risen Christ, I must legally be “a new creature” (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15), having *judicially* “passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24; 1Jo 3:14). As Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they died in Him. In like manner, they are therefore new creatures in Christ—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they rose in Him: “Who is the beginning [i.e. of the new creation—compare Rev 3:14], the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18). Judicially, they are “risen *with Christ*” (Col 3:1).

Not only does the context and its opening, “therefore” preclude us from regarding 2 Corinthians 5:17 as describing what takes place in a soul at regeneration, but the contents of the verse itself forbid such an interpretation. It is indeed true that such a miracle of grace effects a most blessed transformation in the one who is the subject of it, yet *not* such as comes up to the terms here used. What is the principal thing which affects the character and conduct of a person *before* he is born again? Is it not “the flesh”? Beyond dispute it is. Equally indubitable is it that the old nature does *not* “pass away” when God quickens a spiritually-dead soul. It is also true that regeneration is an entrance upon a new life, yet it certainly is not the case that “*all* things are become new,” for he receives neither a new memory nor a new body. If verse 17 be describing some aspect of Christian experience, then it is glorification, for most assuredly its language does not suit regeneration.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us [the ministers of the new covenant—2 Corinthians 3:6] the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18). This also is quite against the popular interpretation of the foregoing. Let it be duly noted that verse 18 opens with “And,” which indicates it continues the same line of thought. “All [‘the’—Greek] things” which are of God refer not to the universe as proceeding from Him, nor to His providential agency by which all events are controlled, but rather to those particular things spoken of from verse 13 onwards: All that Christ accomplished—the great dispensational change which has

resulted from His death and resurrection, the preaching of the ministers of the new covenant—have God for their Author. The outcome of what Christ did is that those for whom He transacted are “reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20); and reconciliation, be it particularly noted, is like justification—entirely *objective*, and not subjective as is regeneration! Reconciliation is—as we have fully demonstrated in our articles on that doctrine—wholly a matter of *relationship*: God’s laying aside His wrath and being at peace with us.

“And hath given to us [His ambassadors] the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world [‘a world’—Greek] unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:18-19). From there to the end of 2 Corinthians 6:10, the apostle informs us what this “ministry” consisted of. First, it was that God “was in Christ, reconciling” not merely an apostate Judaism, but an alienated “world”—that is, the whole election of grace, the “all” of 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15. Then he states the negative side of “reconciliation”—namely, “not imputing their trespasses unto them,” which again brings in the *legal* side of things. The positive side of reconciliation is given in verse 21: “That we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” which is entirely objective and judicial, and in no sense subjective and experimental. How vastly different is that than if he had said, “reconciling a world unto Himself, imparting unto them a new nature” or “subduing their iniquities”! It is not what God works *in* His people, but what by Christ He has done *for* them, that the whole passage treats of.

Turning back again to verse 17, “Therefore”: In view of what has been established in the preceding verses, it necessarily follows that—“if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”—he has a new standing before God; being representatively one with Christ, he has been brought onto resurrection ground, he is a member of that new creation of which Christ is the federal Head; and consequently, he is under an entirely *new Covenant*. This is the grand and incontrovertible conclusion which must be drawn: The “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The natural and national distinctions which obtained under the old covenant find no place on resurrection ground: *They* were connected with the flesh; whereas, the relationship which obtains, and the privileges which are enjoyed under the new covenant are entirely spiritual. Once that was clearly apprehended and laid hold of by faith, it rendered nugatory the contentions of the Judaizers.

It is by no means easy for us at this late date to conceive of what that revolutionary transaction from Judaism to Christianity involved, to Jew and Gentile alike. It was the greatest change this world has ever witnessed. For fifteen centuries, God’s kingdom on earth had been confined unto one favoured nation, during which time all others had been left to walk in their own ways. The gulf which divided Judaism from Paganism was far more real and very much wider than that which exists between Romanism and orthodox Christianity. The divisive spirit between Jew and Gentile was more intense than that which obtains between the several castes in India. But at the Cross, the Mosaic economy “passed away,” the middle wall of partition was broken down; and upon Christ’s resurrection, the “Go not into the way of the Gentiles” (Mat 10:5) gave place to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mar 16:15). Fleshly relationships which had so markedly characterised Judaism, now gave place to spiritual ones; yet it was only with the greatest difficulty that converted Jews could be brought to realise that fact; and much in the New Testament is devoted unto a proving of the same.

The principal design of the entire epistle to the Hebrews was to demonstrate that “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17)! In it, the apostle makes it manifest that the “old covenant” which Jehovah had entered into with Israel, at Sinai, with all its ordinances of worship and the peculiar privileges connected therewith, was disannulled, that it was superseded by a new and better economy. Therein, it is declared that Christ hath “obtained a more excellent ministry” in proportion to His being “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6); and after quoting from Jeremiah 31, where the new covenant was announced, pointed out that the former one “which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). The transcendent superiority of the new above the old is brought out in many details: The former was but temporary, the latter is eternal; the one contained only the shadow of good things to come, the latter the substance. The Aaronic priesthood has been displaced by Christ’s—an earthly inheritance by an heavenly. The blessed contrast between them is set forth most fully in Hebrews 12:18-24.

Not only did the converted Jews find it difficult to adjust themselves to the great change produced by the new covenant displacing the old, but unconverted Jews caused much trouble in the Christian assemblies, insisting that their descent from Abraham conferred special privileges upon them, and that Gentiles could only participate in them by being circumcised and becoming subject to the ceremonial law. Not a little in Paul’s epistles is devoted to a refutation of such errors. That the Corinthians were being harassed by such Judaizers, we have already shown—further evidence is supplied by 2 Corinthians 11:18, where the apostle refers to “many glory after the flesh”—i.e. their natural lineage. But all ground had been cut from under their feet by what he had declared in 2 Corinthians 3 and his unanswerable argument in 2 Corinthians 5:13-18. Christ’s death and resurrection had caused

“old things” to pass away: The old covenant, the Mosaic economy, Judaism, was no more. “*All things are become new*”: A new covenant, Christianity—with better relationships and privileges, a superior standing before God, different ordinances of worship—had been introduced.

The same is true of the epistle to the Galatians, wherein there are many parallels to what has been before us in Corinthians. The churches of Galatia were also troubled by teachers of error, who were seeking to Judaize them, and Paul uses much the same method in exposing their sophistries. “There is neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28) is an echo of “henceforth know we no man after the flesh” (2Co 5:16). In several respects, the contents of Galatians 4:21-31 are similar to what is found in 2 Corinthians 3—for in both, the two covenants are contrasted; and in Galatians 4, under the allegory of Hagar and Sarah and their sons, the superiority of the latter is shown. “Ye that desire to be under the law” (Gal 4:21) means under the old covenant. “Born after the flesh” in verse 23 signifies according to nature, “by promise” equals supernaturally. “These are” means that “*represent* the two covenants” (Gal 4:24). “Cast out the bondwoman and her son” of verse 30 has the force of act, in accordance with the fact that the old things are “passed away”; while the “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (the only other place in the New Testament that expression occurs!!) of Galatians 6:15 is enforcing the same truth as 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Once the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:16 be perceived, there is no place for any dispute as to the signification of what immediately follows. In the light of 2 Corinthians 5:12; 10:7; 11:18, it is unmistakably clear that the apostle was dissuading the Corinthian saints from a carnal and sinful partiality, namely, of regarding men according to “outward appearance,” or fleshly descent; bidding them to esteem their brethren by their relation *to Christ* and not to Abraham, and to view Christ Himself not as “a minister of the circumcision” (Rom 15:8), but as “the mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6) who has made “all things...become new” (2Co 5:17). The old covenant was made with one nation only; the new covenant, with believers of all nations. Its sacrifices made nothing perfect; our Sacrifice has perfected us forever (Heb 10:1, 14). Circumcision was for the natural seed of Jacob; baptism is for the spiritual children of Christ. Only the Levites were permitted to enter the holy place, all the children of God have the right of immediate access to Him. The seventh day was the Sabbath under the Siniatic constitution; the first day celebrates the order of things introduced by a risen Christ. “Old things are passed away; behold, *all things are become new*”!

*N.B.*⁴ The “great change” which the grand miracle of grace effects in God’s elect will be examined in considerable detail (D.V.) in next year’s issues.

DECEMBER

THE PRECEPTS AND LIBERTY

“So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will *walk at liberty*: for I seek thy precepts” (Psa 119:44-45). But do not men at large—at least in the ‘civilized’ world—“walk at liberty”? The great majority think so, but they are much mistaken. The fact is that sin has thoroughly perverted the judgment of the natural man, so that he is wanting in any true sense of values; and hence, it is that the Word of truth says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa 5:20). So completely has sin blinded the unregenerate that they suppose that bondage is freedom; and freedom, bondage. The sinner imagines that he can only enjoy liberty while he is lord of himself, and that to surrender unto the claims of Christ and take His yoke upon him would be bringing him into captivity. *That is why* he sees in the Lord Jesus “no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2)!

⁴ N.B.—*Nota Bene*, Latin, meaning: a note of importance.

A false notion of liberty possesses all of our hearts. Until the Holy Spirit takes us in hand, we want to be at our own disposal and do whatever we please, without any one to call us to account. Yet the impracticability of such a notion appears in the outworking of it in the natural world. If there were not government in the human sphere, every man doing that which was right in his own eyes, there would be a state of utter lawlessness—anarchy. Still more evident, to those with anointed eyes, is the untenability and wickedness of such a notion when applied to the spiritual realm. Since God be our Creator, since we are wholly dependent upon Him—even for every breath that we draw—it becomes us to be in subjection to Him, for to Him we are accountable for all of our actions. Manifestly, it is our duty both to will and to do that which is pleasing to our Maker, our Benefactor, our Judge.

“I will walk at liberty” (Psa 119:45). Note well, that statement is preceded by “I keep thy law continually,” and is followed by “for I seek thy precepts.” Rightly did Thomas Scott (1747-1821) point out, “The service of God is perfect freedom, and every deviation is proportional slavery to sin and Satan.” Only in the path of God’s precepts does the soul find true liberty—that is why God’s Law (the expression of His will) is called “the perfect law of *liberty*” (Jam 1:25; 2:12)! By the Fall, we have come under the law of sin and death; and consequently, we are fettered by our corruptions and bound over to eternal misery. But God’s Word makes known to us the way of deliverance from that bondage. Sin destroys man’s liberty, for it prevents him prosecuting his chief end—which is to glorify God—as it equally hinders him from attaining his highest good, which is to be holy and happy. Only by heeding the Law of the Lord can emancipation be obtained.

License is not liberty, for true liberty is not the opportunity to do what we want, but it is the power to do what we ought. Freedom of heart lies in a course of obedience to God, for there is no satisfaction to the heart until it finds its satisfaction in the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The difference between the license of the natural man and the liberty of the spiritual man is that of being the bond-slave of sin and “the Lord’s freeman” (1Co 7:22); and that is determined by the chains of darkness being displaced by the cords of duty, the fetters of sin by the yoke of Christ. And Christ’s yoke is “easy” (Mat 11:30), for it is lined with love. God’s commandments “are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3), for they are dictated by infinite wisdom and are designed for our highest good. Loving, pleasing, enjoying, praising God is the only real freedom and blessedness. God’s precepts must be *sought*—desired and attended to—if we are to “walk at liberty.”

The more whole-heartedly and constantly we “seek” God’s precepts and order our lives by them, the more will we “walk at liberty.” 1. Thereby we shall be delivered from the darkness of a sin-blinded understanding. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psa 119:130). “Simple” there does not mean dull-witted, weak-minded, or illiterate, but one who is plain-hearted, sincere, and with an eye single to God’s glory (compare 2Co 1:12). It is the words of God being received into an honest and good heart which dispels the mists of error, disperses the clouds of prejudice, exposes the lies of Satan, and illuminates the soul. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Psa 111:10). The more we walk the path of obedience, the sounder becomes our judgment, and the keener our discernment in perceiving what would promote or what would make against our best interests.

2. Thereby we are delivered from the bondage of our lusts. No man can serve two masters. In our unregenerate days, we were entirely dominated by our corruptions, for God had no place in our hearts and lives. But the more He possesses our hearts, and the more we are governed by His precepts, the less will sin tyrannize us. “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). To “walk in the Spirit” is to be governed by that Word of Truth which he dictated for us. Therefore, our daily prayer needs to be “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133). If some iniquity *has* “dominion” over me, it is because my steps are not ordered by the Word in all things.

3. Thereby we are delivered from a sin-enslaved will. We do not propose to enter here into a philosophical disquisition on the nature and exercises of the will. The natural man’s will is quite free to choose, but *what determines* his choice? His inclinations: he always chooses that which, everything considered, is most agreeable to him. Being fallen, he prefers to serve self rather than God, the world more than Christ, the pleasures of sin above holiness; and therefore, always chooses the former. God makes His people willing in the day of His power to choose Christ by bringing them to feel their need of Him and giving them a desire for Him. The will of the sinner is “free *from* righteousness”; of the saint, “free *from sin*” (Rom 6:18, 20)! The more we love God’s law and the pleasanter obedience becomes to us, the more the will is emancipated from the power of our corruptions.

4. Thereby are we delivered from the accusations of a guilty conscience. Just so long as we lived in rebellion against God, that inward monitor condemned us; and though at times we succeeded in drowning its voice, there were moments and seasons when our rest was disturbed. But “great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa

119:165). The more we love God's law and the more we seek His precepts, the more freedom have we from convictions of guilt.

5. Thereby are we delivered from the snares of the Fowler. The unregenerate "are taken captive by him at his will" (2Ti 2:26), so that it is *his* behests they perform (Joh 8:44). But "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Joh 8:36).

6. Thereby we are freed from the disapprobation of God. If we be truly seeking His precepts, we shall enjoy the quickenings and comforts of the Spirit; it is our self-will which "grieves" Him and restrains His gracious operations within us. So too we shall escape God's chastenings, for it is when we forsake His Law and keep not His commandments that He visits our transgressions with the rod and His providences are against us (Psa 89:30-32).

7. Thereby are we delivered from the bondage of human opinions and customs. There are not a few professing Christians whose freedom is circumscribed by "the commandments and doctrines of men" with their "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col 2:20-22), but the one who is regulated only by God's precepts will walk at liberty from such impositions.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

36. Philippians 1:8-11, Part 4 (1:10-11)

“That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:10-11). By the “day of Christ,” we understand the time when He shall be revealed before an assembled universe as King of kings and Lord of lords, when He shall judge the world in righteousness (Act 17:31), “taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel” and being “glorified in his saints” (2Th 1:7-10). For the redeemed, it will be a day of examination and adjudication (Rom 14:12; 2Co 5:10)—not for the purpose of ascertaining their justification, but to attest their sanctification, to exhibit what grace had wrought in them; that the radical difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate, the blessed and the cursed, may be fully displayed; that Christ might be owned and magnified as the Author of all their godliness; and that they may be rewarded for their good works. It will then appear that the outstanding characteristic which distinguishes the children of God from the children of disobedience is that of *personal holiness*—holiness both of character and conduct; and since holiness has both a negative and positive side to it, the apostle has here designedly linked together “without offence” and “being filled with the fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:10-11).

This phrase, “till the day of Christ” coming in between “without offence” and “being filled with the fruits of righteousness” belongs to each of them, both in grammatical sense and doctrinal purport. From its insertion there, we may gather at least three things. First, it is required that this negative and positive holiness *be maintained* without interruption until that day; or, in other words it enforces the necessity of the saints’ perseverance unto the end of their course. Second, it intimates the *special relation* which holiness has *unto* that “day,” when “every man’s work shall be made manifest” (1Co 3:13) and the Lord “both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1Co 4:5). Third, it sets before us a *powerful incentive* to live hourly with the judgment seat of Christ before us, that “we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1Jo 2:28). Christ warned His disciples against carnality, lest “that day come upon you unawares” (Luk 21:24), and His apostle exhorted believers in view of that day to “cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom 13:12).

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:11): of *what* “righteousness”? No doubt, quite a number of our readers would answer the imputed righteousness of Christ; yet in so doing, they would be mistaken. It is important to recognise the threefold distinction the New Testament makes. There is a righteousness God communicates to His people in regeneration, there is a righteousness reckoned to their account at justification, and there is a righteousness wrought out by them in their sanctification. Those who confound those three things confuse themselves and imbibe error. When it is said “the effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth much” (Jam 5:16), it signifies more than one to whom the obedience of Christ has been imputed, namely, one whose *heart* is right and whose *ways* are pleasing to God. One who has been justified may be in a backslidden state; and while that be the case, his prayers would avail nothing (Isa 59:2, Jam 4:3)! If we would ask and receive of God, then we must “keep his commandments” (1Jo 3:22). Righteousness is right doing, walking according to the divine Rule, namely, the Law of the Lord, and keeping His commandments is what is termed practical righteousness—righteousness wrought out in our practice. But since by nature, “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10), a miracle of grace must first take place within us.

As the Lord Jesus declared, “make the tree good, and his fruit good” (Mat 12:33), for grapes are not borne by thorns, nor figs by thistles. The heart must needs first be made right, before our conduct will become so. Only a righteous man will produce the fruits of righteousness: he must have a righteous root within from whence they come. At regeneration, a principle of righteousness is imparted to the soul. In that miracle of grace, the heart is made right with God. At the new birth, a nature is received “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24); and when the saints are there exhorted to “put on [as a uniform] the new man,” they are enjoined to live and walk as new creatures in Christ. That principle of righteousness received from God at regeneration, that new and holy nature, is expressly said to be “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works”

(Eph 2:10)—that is the end for which He regenerates us, that our lives may glorify Him. The tree is made good that it may bear good fruit. “Created in Christ Jesus” means that at the new birth, we are made vitally one with Him; and as faith in Christ (a cleaving to Him) is the first act of the spiritual babe, His righteousness is then imputed to him, so that he is legally—as well as experimentally—righteous before God.

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1Jo 2:29). That tells us one of the ways by which we may recognise the regenerate, and distinguish them from unregenerate professors, namely, by their conduct—for it is by their fruit that the tree is known. In sharp contrast from the “children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), the regenerate children of God walk in obedience to Him, treading “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psa 23:3), heeding His precepts, and keeping His statutes. Like begets like: God is righteous, and He makes His children so. Like father, like children. If the reader will carefully ponder John 8:38-44, he will see how that truth is argued and proved: the Son, being like unto the Father; the wicked, bearing the features and performing the will of their father, the devil. The regenerate, then, are “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isa 61:3); and He is glorified by their bearing “the fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:11). Only the *doer* of righteousness is really born of God; and therefore, one whose character and conduct is unrighteous in his ways and walk cannot be a righteous person, and should not be regarded so by the saints.

Now the “fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:11) brought forth by a righteous person are those acts which be agreeable to the Law of God and which have the Word of God for their Rule. Righteousness is right doing; and only that can be right, which accords with the revealed will of God. Unless *He* has appointed a certain line of conduct for us to engage in, our actions would either be men-pleasing, or self-seeking. A succinct summary of God’s will is made known unto us in the Ten Commandments, the Moral Law being the rule for us to walk by—the Gospel precepts or exhortations found in the Epistles are but so many explications of those commandments, applied to the varied relations and details of our lives. As “sin is the transgression of the law,” so righteousness is a conformity to it (1Jo 3:4-7). The fruits of righteousness, therefore, are those works which the Christian performs answerably to that which the Word of God warrants and requires—in other words, they are acts of *obedience* unto the Lord. “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).

“Being *filled* with the fruits of righteousness” (Phi 1:11). This was the God-honouring standard of excellence which the apostle longed that the saints should attain unto. Here again we are struck with the vast difference between *his* large-heartedness and those whose supplications are so cramped in spirit and limited in scope. It is a false humility, which restricts our requests within narrow bounds. It is nothing but unbelief which limits the bounty of God to the bestowing of trifling favours. Nor is the plea of our unworthiness any valid reason to justify the poverty of our asking. No saint has ever presumed to approach God and seek blessings from Him on the basis of his own worthiness: the most spiritual and pious Christian who ever lived was heavily in debt to God, and therefore, could only supplicate for mercy on the ground of His infinite *grace*. Paul, then, was not content to see these Philippians bearing *some* fruit, but prayed that they might be “*filled* with the fruits of righteousness” and he based not that request on anything which they had to their credit, but rather did he eye the munificence of God and ask in accordance therewith. Let none of us ever rest satisfied with a small measure of grace.

The bringing forth the fruits of righteousness abundantly should be the deep and daily concern of every child of God, for His honour is never more promoted than when we are so engaged. Said the Lord Jesus, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; *so* shall ye be my disciples” (Joh 15:8)—in this manner, shall ye make evident the real and radical difference there is between you and hypocrites. The Father is not glorified by our lip service, but by the tenour and texture of our daily lives, by having all our steps and actions ordered by His Word. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:16): those “good works” are the same thing as these “fruits of righteousness”; and we should be wholly taken up with the performing of the same. We believe that in His “*so* shine,” Christ gave warning of a danger: we need to beware of aiming at our *own* glory in such fruit-bearing. God has not given us the Spirit for the purpose of serving and magnifying ourselves. He who aims to gain a reputation for eminent piety before his fellows has yielded to the spirit of Phariseeism. Divine grace is not bestowed upon the Christian to advance his honour, but to glorify its Giver.

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) understood the “being filled with the fruits of righteousness” to have a threefold force. First, *the whole Christian* to be so engaged. “A tree is said to be filled with fruit when all its branches are down-laden with them, so as there is not a twig empty nor thin-set therewith. Now, as the heart in man is the bulk and body of this tree, so every power of the soul, member of the body, is a branch, and is so to be understood in this

allusion.” Before conversion, were not all our inward faculties and external organs used in the service of unrighteousness?—if not designedly so, yet actually, for they were not employed in serving *God*. What were our affections set upon, what chiefly engaged our minds, how were our eyes and ears, lips, and hands occupied? As we formerly yielded our members to iniquity, “even so now yield your members servants to righteousness” (Rom 6:19)—*all* of them, so that ye may be *filled* with such fruits. The godly man is likened unto a flourishing tree in Psalm 1; and one of the fruits there mentioned is the budding of holy thoughts: “In his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa 1:2). He stores his mind with its precepts and promises, he studies how best he can please God, he devises good (Pro 14:22), and “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7).

Second, “A Christian is filled with fruit when good works *of all sorts* do grow there. ‘Unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God’ (Col 1:10): ‘In all pleasing,’ that is, all the ways whereby God is pleased, in all that is the will of God concerning us, to be done by us.” If the believer is to be “filled with the fruits of righteousness,” *every grace* must be active. “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2Pe 1:5-7). Therein, the Christian differs from all other trees, for though a natural tree may be heavily laden, yet only with the fruit of one kind; whereas “the fruit of the Spirit is in *all* goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph 5:9). Said the apostle, “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in *this* grace *also*” (2Co 8:7)—i.e. this of contributing to the needs of the poor of the flock, he would have them lacking in nothing. If we are to be filled with fruits, then we must have respect to *all* the divine commandments (Psa 119:6), being remiss in no duty and failing in no practice of godliness, withholding nothing that is due unto the Lord.

Third, to be filled with the fruits of righteousness is to be filled with them *at all times*. “Our whole time is to be filled with some good work or other. Now there are these things our time is to be filled withal: our callings, recreations, holy duties; and we are to subordinate the one to the other; and then, we are holy in all. A man brings forth fruit in recreations, as well as in holy duties, if his *end be* to have spirits to perform holy duties with. Blossoms may wither and fall off, yet prepare for fruit. Now, it is impossible to give certain rules what time is to be allotted for each of these: the conditions, tempers, and constitutions do so vary. Poor men, that live by their daily labour, are necessitated to spend more time in their calling, than in recreations and duties. Men that are of weak and fiery spirits, and have callings that are exhausters of them, are as much necessitated to spend more time in recreations than in their callings or holy duties—though perhaps if such men had grace enough, even the most serious duties might be a recreation to them. But if a man proportions wisely and conscientiously his time according to his conditions, and puts holy ends in all, he will be found for the circumstance he stood in, the ground he was planted in, filled with the fruits of righteousness.”

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by [Revised Version—“through”] Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:11). How jealous was the apostle for the glory of his Master, giving honour to whom honour was due! Though these fruits be borne by the saints—and without them, they would not be saints—yet they originate not from them, and therefore, they have no ground for boasting. “From me is thy fruit found” (Hos 14:8). He is the vitalizing Vine of which we are the branches. Yet our verse is very far from teaching that Christians are entirely passive in their fruit-bearing, or that they may excuse comparative fruitlessness by attributing the same unto the sovereignty of the Lord—that it was not His good pleasure they should be more productive. Such an idea is a wicked perversion of a blessed truth, and Christ Himself gave the lie to it when He declared, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear *much* fruit” (Joh 15:8), as His apostle also did in our text, when he prayed that the saints should be “filled” with the same. If we are not, the blame rests wholly upon ourselves, and it is a horrible and Satanic slander to attribute it to anything in God. Very different was the teaching of the Puritans from such Antinomianism.

In his most excellent exposition of the phrase, “Which are by Jesus Christ,” T. Goodwin explained it to signify: First, they “are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10)—that is, they issue from our being made vitally one with Him (united to Him) at regeneration.

Second, “because they are such fruits as do arise from the Spirit of Jesus Christ, received from Him and dwelling in the heart.” Christ is the root; the new nature is the branch springing forth from Him; the Holy Spirit is the energizer and fructifier.

Third, “fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ because they are the fruits that follow upon a man’s apprehending (laying hold of) the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ for his righteousness...the great spring of holiness and obedience is faith in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus.”

But that well-balanced Puritan did not stop short there—as the hyper-Calvinists do—but went on to point out: “Fourth, fruits of righteousness are by Christ because they are so by *motives drawn from Him*,” amplifying the same by showing that when the dying love of Christ constrains us to obedience, when His grace teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; when we realise He redeemed us to be a peculiar people zealous of good works; when *these* are the motives whereby a man is acted, his holy actions are the fruits of righteousness.

Fifth, “fruits of righteousness are by Christ because they flow from *our union* with His person; and therefore, the apostle speaks of our growing up ‘into him in all things’ (Eph 4:15). The way to grow up in all things is to grow up in Him—into nearer union and communion with His person, and fellowship with Him; and growing up herein, a man grows more holy.”

Sixth, they are “the fruits of righteousness” when *the example* of Christ is before me *to move me to* the like righteousness. ‘He that saith he abideth in him [saith the apostle in 1 John 2:6] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.’” He is to be our Model and Pattern in all things. It is to His holy image we are to be conformed, and just so far as we “follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21) do we bear the fruits of righteousness which are by Him.

Seventh, “My actions are fruits of righteousness when I look for all the *acceptance* of my fruits in Jesus Christ, or when I expect that they shall all be accepted of God in and through Jesus Christ, and not as they come from me. Thus our services are expressed to be ‘spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ’ (1Pe 2:5).” Our best performances are faulty, and are only pleasing unto God as they are presented in the name of Christ and perfumed with His merits.

Unto the above we would add, fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ as we *wear His yoke*. The key passage on fruit-bearing is John 15; and there, as all through Scripture, is a perfect blending of the divine and human sides. If on the one hand, we learn that Christ is the true Vine, and His Father the Husbandman who purgeth every branch that it may bring forth more fruit; on the other hand, Christ there exhorts us to “*abide* in me, and I in you” (Joh 15:4) (which enforces your responsibility); and then adds, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (Joh 15:4). To “abide” in Christ is to be yoked to Him, to walk with Him, to commune with Him, to draw from Him; it is the opposite of wandering from Him to allow something to come between our heart and Himself. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). The marginal rendering is much to be preferred, sustaining as it does the figure used in the context: Christ was not there emphasising the impotency of the believer, but was enforcing the impossibility of his bearing fruit if *fellowship* with Himself was broken—stressing the imperative need of our “abiding” in our walking with Him.

“Unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:11). This clause also qualifies the first one: only those are the “fruits of righteousness” which are produced with *this* specific aim and design. All our actions should be directed by the heart unto this grand end: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). Neither the pleasing of self, nor the approbation of our fellows, must be our motive. No matter what we may be employed in, whether it be our daily callings or recreations, the honour and pleasing of God must be as definitely eyed as when we are exercised in holy duties. When speaking of the giving of alms—which is one fruit of righteousness—the apostle says, “If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1Pe 4:11). That was ever what regulated and marked our blessed Redeemer. He never sought honour for Himself, but constantly had the glory of His Father in view; and if we have received His Spirit and abide in Him, that will characterise us. When our hearts are imbued with God’s glory, when we aim at and refer all to the same, then are our works “unto the glory and praise of God,” and then are they “the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:11)!

We will reserve our remarks upon the being “without offence till the day of Christ” (Phi 1:10) until we come (D.V.) to 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and 5:23-24, but will offer a few words on the “being filled with the fruits of righteousness” in reference to that Day. As stated in our second paragraph, “the day of Christ” was here mentioned by Paul, because our holiness bears a special relation to that season. As T. Goodwin pointed out: “It shall not be with a man as with other trees, that have long borne fruit and at the last have none appearing on them; but all the fruit that man hath borne successively in his whole life, he shall appear withal at the latter day. Wicked men shall appear with all their bad works, and godly men shall appear with all their good works; and therefore the end of the world is called a *harvest* (Mat 13:39) and a *reaping* (Gal 6:5-7), where the apostle alludeth to the day of judgment. ‘He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed,’ but when the harvest is, he shall ‘come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves’ (Psa 126:6). Now that which the apostle prayed for in the behalf of these Philippians is that at that day, they might appear filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.” What an

incentive to holiness to keep *that* before us! Those fruits will be to the honour of Christ, the glory of God; and we shall be richly rewarded.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

16. The Jordan (3:2-3)

“And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it” (Jos 3:2-3). For three days, the congregation of Israel had been encamped before that river which barred their entrance into the land of promise; thus being obliged to take full stock of that formidable barrier and made fully conscious of their own helplessness. The Jordan is the symbol of death; and it is not until the saint appropriates the solemn truth—or has learned from painful experience—that death is written upon all his natural powers that he is likely to make any real spiritual progress or enter practically into his fair heritage. *That* was the great lesson which had to be learned by the father of them that believe, before his longing could be realised and fruit borne. Because Sarah was barren, he thought to obtain the desired son by Hagar, only to bring trouble upon his household. Not until he truly recognised the natural impotency of himself and his wife did he count upon Him who quickeneth the dead: Romans 4:17-21.

Thus it was, too, with the chief of the apostles: “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death [Act 19:22-41], and doth deliver [from those who then sought his life]: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2Co 1:8-10). It is God’s way with His people to so order His providences that they are “pressed out of measure, above strength” (2Co 1:8), until they are brought to despair of deliverance by their own efforts. Then it is they discover that death is stamped upon all their members and powers and are brought to acknowledge, “we have no might...neither know we what to do” (2Ch 20:12). Ah, but note they at once added, “but our eyes are *upon thee*”! It was for that very reason Paul and his companions had “the sentence of death” in themselves—that they “should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2Co 1:9).

By nature, we are self-confident, and by practice, to a considerable extent self-reliant. But those qualities have no scope or place in the spiritual life, having to be completely renounced. Just as we must repudiate our own righteousness before the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, so we are required to disown our own wisdom and strength, ere the power of Christ works in us and for us. “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mar 8:34) is Christ’s own unchanging demand. To “deny himself” is for a man to abandon all trust in himself, to disclaim any capability of his own, to be emptied of self. In order thereto, God often brings him into situations where he discovers it is utterly vain to look to himself for relief. Until he has found out that all attempts to extricate himself are futile, he has not learned his utter helplessness; and until he does so, he will not really look outside himself unto the Lord. Israel then were made to feel their powerlessness during the three days they were encamped before the overflowing Jordan; and that, in order to prepare them to count upon the Almighty.

But let it also be duly observed that to “deny himself” is not only for a man to disown his own righteousness, wisdom, and strength, but also to renounce all self-will and self-pleasing. The *whole* of “self” is to be set aside, and “the cross” taken up—that is, the principle of self-sacrifice is to dominate and regulate him; and that, in order to “follow Christ.” The former are a negative means to an end: they are preparatives unto a life of obedience, or a practical owning of the Lordship of Christ. We turn to God “from idols”—the chief of which is *self*—that we should “serve the living and true God” (1Th 1:9)—i.e. that we should be subject to Him, and governed by Him. And that is the important truth set forth here. Israel were now commanded to turn their gaze away from the Jordan, and fix their eyes steadily on “the ark.” And of what or of whom does the ark speak? Of *Christ*, says the reader. True, yet such an answer is far too general to be of any elucidation. Of Christ in what relation?—Of His person, His work, or His official character? If of His office, which particular aspect thereof?

It should be evident to any attentive student that the spiritual interpretation of our passage—both doctrinally and practically—turns upon our answers to those questions. The ark is the central object in this miraculous event, being mentioned by name in chapters 3 and 4 no less than sixteen times, and alluded to as “it” five times, or a total of twenty-one times—or 7×3 , which, in the language of Scripture numerics signifies a complete manifestation of God. What, then, was the ark; and for what purpose was it made? The ark was a coffer or chest, made of shittim wood, overlaid both within and without with pure gold (Exo 25:10-11). It was to be a depository for the two tables of stone (Exo 25:16); and accordingly, when all its sacred furniture was made and the tabernacle was set up, we are told that Moses “took and put the testimony into the ark” (Exo 40:20), where it still abode in the days of Solomon (1Ki 8:9). It is most essential that this fact be carefully noted, if we are to perceive aright the spiritual meaning of this holy vessel: the ark was made *for the Law*—and not the Law for the ark—as is abundantly clear from Deuteronomy 10:1-5.

It was for the above-mentioned reason that the ark was called “the ark of the testimony” (Exo 26:33-34, etc.). The tables of stone on which the finger of God had written the Ten Commandments were termed the “tables of testimony” (Exo 31:18); and from their being deposited in it, the ark received its principal designation; and since the ark was the most important object in the tabernacle, it was called “the tabernacle of testimony” (Num 1:50, 53, etc.). The tables of stone were designated “the testimony”; the ark, “the ark of the testimony”; and the tabernacle, “the tabernacle of testimony,” because they one and all declared *what God is* and made known the terms on which He would hold fellowship with His people. The Law was a revelation of the righteousness of Jehovah, with its demands upon the faith, love, and obedience of His saints. It witnessed immediately to the divine holiness, yet by necessary implication, to the sinfulness of Israel. The tabernacle was the place of God’s habitation where Israel was to meet with Him: not only to receive a knowledge of His will and hold fellowship with Him (Exo 25:21-22), but also having a prominent respect to their sins against which the Law was ever testifying, and to use the appointed means of their restoration to His favour and blessing.

It has not been sufficiently recognised by more recent writers that in that Tabernacle of Testimony, not only was witness plainly borne unto the ineffable holiness and majesty of the Lord, but also to His gracious condescension and abounding mercy. It testified to the wondrous provisions He had made whereby transgressors of the Law could receive pardon and the defiled be cleansed. In its outer court stood the brazen altar, where sacrifices of atonement were offered. There too was the laver of water for the washing of the hands and feet (Exo 30:18-20). Still more significant and blessed, the very ark which enshrined the Law was covered with the mercy-seat (Exo 25:21)! That mercy-seat formed Jehovah’s throne in Israel, for it was there between the cherubim seat that He “dwellest” (Psa 80:1, etc.), ruling over His people. Thus the ark and its lid, the mercy-seat, testified unto His being “a just God and a Saviour” (Isa 45:21): the Law, proclaiming His inexorable justice, the mercy-seat testifying to the provision of His grace for the transgressions of His people—a covering of mercy that they might draw near unto Him and live.

We turn now to take particular note of the fact that in Joshua 3:3, etc., the ark is called “the ark of *the covenant*,” the reference being to that compact into which Jehovah entered with Israel at Sinai and which they solemnly bound themselves to keep (Exo 19:1-6; 24:1-8). By the establishment of the Sinaitic Covenant, the relation between God and Israel was brought into a state of formal completeness. Under the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:7-8, etc.), the Lord had pledged Himself to faithfully bestow upon Abraham’s seed every needful blessing; and now that covenant of promise was supplemented by the covenant of Law, which bound that seed to render the dutiful return of obedience which their gracious God justly required from them. The foundation was thus outwardly laid for a near and lasting relationship, resulting in a blessed intercourse between the God of Abraham on the one hand, and the dutiful descendants of Abraham on the other. And it was primarily with the design of furthering and securing that end that the ratification of the covenant at Sinai was so immediately followed by instructions for the making and erection of the tabernacle.

The Ten Commandments were *the terms* of the covenant entered into at Sinai (Exo 34:28): “And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments” (Deu 4:13); and it was on the basis of their compliance therewith that God undertook to deal with Israel and make good His promises to Abraham. His readiness to show Himself strong in their behalf was at once evidenced: “And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days’ journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days’ journey, to search out a resting place for them” (Num 10:33). But alas, the very next thing recorded is “the people complained” and “it displeased the LORD” (Num 11:1); and His chastening hand fell heavily upon them. Then we learn of the opposition made against Moses by his own brother and sister, and the Lord’s smiting Miriam with leprosy (Num 12). That is at once followed by an account of the sending forth of the twelve men to spy out the

land of Canaan, the mixed report which they made upon their return, the unbelief and rebellion of the people, with their repudiation of Moses as their leader and determination to return unto Egypt (Num 13; 14:1-5).

The evil conduct of Israel is summed up by the Psalmist in those solemn words, “They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law” (Psa 78:10). Their breaking of the covenant at once released the Lord from making good unto *that* perverse generation His declarations unto Abraham; and therefore, He told them, “But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness...After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise” (Num 14:32-34). They should know to their lasting misery what had produced that “breach of promise” (compare the “if” of Exodus 19:5!) and the protracted and woe-ful consequences thereof. The promises Jehovah made unto Abraham and unto Moses would not be fulfilled unto that particular generation because of their unbelief and disobedience; but unto their descendants, they should be made fully good. As Joshua himself testified at a later date, “the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hands. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Jos 21:44-45).

The forty years’ wandering in the wilderness expired with the death of Moses, and all whose sins occasioned that punishment had also died. It was the new and younger generation over which Joshua was placed, and now a fresh chapter opened in the history of Israel. What has been pointed out above explains not only the prominent position occupied by the ark in the crossing of Jordan and in the subsequent events, but why it is there designated “the ark of the covenant.” Israel’s success—or rather, the Lord’s showing Himself strong in their behalf—would turn upon *their keeping of* the covenant established at Sinai and their walking in implicit obedience unto God. Israel’s crossing of the Jordan with their eyes fixed on the ark signified that they marched into Canaan *led by the Law*!

What has just been emphasized is of something more than mere historical importance: it is recorded for the instruction of God’s people in *all* generations, and needs to be turned by them into earnest prayer for divine enablement. It reveals to us the principal thing which the Holy One requires from us, if He is to undertake for us and make a way through whatever “Jordan” may confront us. It makes known the basic principle of God’s governmental dealings with His people in every age: the exercise of His power on our behalf is regulated by our submission to Him. God cannot be the Patron of sin; and therefore, He will not show Himself strong in the behalf of rebellious subjects. As said before, we must deny self and take up our cross in order to “follow” Christ; and what *that* signifies is made clear to us here in Israel’s “following” the ark of the covenant. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6)—and *He* walked in perfect subjection to the Law of God!

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

13. Conclusion

In the course of our explanation of this doctrine, we have sought to take a comprehensive view of it as a whole, and then to examine in detail its essential components. Truth is a unit, one harmonious whole, but with our very limited powers of comprehension, we are incapable of receiving it as such: rather, do we take it in “here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:10, 13). That is according as God has constituted us. When endeavouring to master a subject or problem which is presented to the mind, we are obliged to consider singly its several elements and branches. When partaking of material food, we do not attempt to swallow it whole, but first break it into fragments and then masticate them. It is thus with the spiritual aliment, which God has provided for the soul. Unless we carefully collate all that the Spirit has revealed on a subject, duly ponder each aspect, and view it in its true perspective, we shall obtain nothing more than a vague and faulty conception thereof.

Though Truth be a unit, it has two sides to it. It is thus in the communicating of it: it is a divine revelation, yet it passed through the minds of holy men and is couched in their language. It is thus with its contents, as a whole and all its parts. There is both a divine and a human side to it, issuing from God, addressed to men: revealing His heart and will, enforcing our responsibility. That necessarily presents a problem to the finite mind—the more so, since our mind is impaired by the ravages of sin. As man is constructed, he is unable to take in both sides of the Truth at a

single glance, being obliged to view each separately. Unless he does so, a distorted vision will inevitably ensue, for while contemplating but one half, he will imagine that he is actually viewing the whole. Now those two sides of the Truth are not contradictory, but complementary. Since God be God, He must maintain His sovereign rights and enforce His authority; and since He has constituted man a moral agent, He deals with him accordingly—having absolute control over him, yet leaving him to act freely.

This twofoldness of truth is exhibited in every doctrine contained in Holy Writ, in every aspect of the Faith, in every branch of the Evangelical system; and it is in the maintaining of a due proportion and balance between them that the competency and helpfulness of any expositor chiefly appears, as it is also the hardest part of his task. Most conspicuously is this the case with the doctrine we have been treating of, for not only is reconciliation itself a mutual affair, but Scripture presents reconciliation as being both an accomplished thing and also as something now being effected—according as it is viewed from the standpoint of what Christ wrought at the cross, or from what is required of the sinner in order for him to personally enter into the good of what the Redeemer there procured. It is specially for the benefit of the young preacher—scores of which will read them—that these closing paragraphs are penned, for unless he be quite clear upon this distinction, his trumpet will give forth an uncertain sound.

When was God really reconciled to the Christian?—at the cross, or when he savingly believed the Gospel? That question was before us on pages 141 and 142 (June 1945), the bottom of 186 (August 1945) of last year's issues, and on page 42 of this (February 1946); yet we believe that some will welcome a further elucidation. On this subject, as so many, the Puritans are much to be preferred to the best writers of the nineteenth century. "God is never actually reconciled to us, nor we to Him, till He gives us the regenerating Spirit" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). "For the preparing us to be reconciled, it is necessary that we be convinced that we be enemies to God, and that He accounts us such, and that so long as we remain in that state, He is also an enemy to us" (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680). "There is a double reconciliation here (2Co 5:18-19). First, fundamental, at the death of Christ, whereby it was obtained. This is the ground of God's laying aside His anger. Second, actual or particular, when it is complied with by faith. This regards the application of it, when God does actually lay aside His enmity, and imputes sin no more to the person" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

Elsewhere, S. Charnock says, "He acts toward the world as a reconciling God, towards believers as reconciled. He is reconcilable as long as He is inviting and keeps men alive in a state of probation." The Puritans drew a plain and broad line of demarcation between the impetration or purchase of salvation, and the actual or bestowing of the same. "By *impetration*, we mean the purchase of all good things made by Christ for us with and of the Father; and by *application*, the actual enjoyment of those good things upon our believing; as if a man paid a price for the redeeming of captives, the paying of a price supplieth the room of the impetration of which we speak, and the freeing of the captives is the application of it" (John Owen, 1616-1683). Christ merited and obtained the reconciliation of both sides, yet God has not reconciled to us—nor are we to Him—until we repent and believe. So it is in justification: Christ wrought out a perfect and everlasting righteousness for all His people, yet God does not impute that righteousness to any of them, until they savingly believe the Gospel.

While most of the best theologians of the last century recognised the necessary distinction between the impetration and the application of reconciliation, yet often they failed to frame their postulates consistently therewith. For instance, one of the most eminent of them—and for whose works, we have a high regard—stated: "On the ground of God's reconciliation to us, we are exhorted to be reconciled to Him, and the great motive or encouragement is His previous reconciliation." That such language was not simply a slip of the pen (to which all are liable) is clear from what follows in his next paragraph: "'The chastisement of our peace,' by which peace was procured, 'was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed' (Isa 53:5). God was reconciled when that was done, and made justice cease to demand our punishment." It is because such teaching has been so widely received and has led to serious mischief in the evangelical ministry, that its erroneous character needs to be exposed.

To affirm that God is reconciled to sinners—or if you prefer it, to His elect—before they are reconciled to Him is an unintentional, but tacit, repudiation of John 3:36: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Note it is not "the wrath of God shall come upon Him," but it is on him now and remains so as long as he be an unbeliever. In these respects, there is no difference whatever between the elect and the non-elect: all are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3), under the Covenant of Works, and therefore, under the curse and condemnation of the Law. The work of Christ has not changed the attitude of a holy God toward a single soul who continues in love with sin and a rebel against Him. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa 7:11), and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). It is not until the sinner repents and savingly believes the Gospel that he passes from one state to another, and

the frown of God is displaced by His smile (Joh 3:18; 5:24). Of the elect, it is said, “which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but *now* have obtained mercy” (1Pe 2:10).

Here is another declaration from a nineteenth century theologian of high repute, and to whose works we are personally indebted not a little: “God is reconciled: He is no longer angry with the sinner, for he is no longer a sinner in the eye of God and His justice.” Had he said, “The penitent and believing sinner,” that would be blessedly true; instead, he was discussing what Christ’s work had accomplished Godwards. In the same paragraph, he averred, “All the chosen people are redeemed,” which is another statement badly in need of qualification and explanation. Christ indeed “gave himself a ransom for all” (1Ti 2:6)—His people; and He did so “that [in order that!] he *might* redeem us from all iniquity” (Titus 2:14), but none then unborn were actually “redeemed.” The correct way to state it is this: Redemption was purchased for all the chosen people by Christ, and “in due time” (1Ti 2:6), they are made partakers of that redemption by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit. Believers alone are actually redeemed or emancipated, and it is of *them* such passages as Galatians 3:3; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18:19 speak.

It is only by attending closely to the exact wording of Scripture and refusing to go one iota beyond its statements that we are preserved from confusion and error. Christ was made sin for us “that we *might be* made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). It is not said that “Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to all His people,” but “to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4). “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty *might be* rich” (2Co 8:9). He was “made a curse for us...that the blessing of Abraham *might come* on the Gentiles” (Gal 3:13-14). Christ “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he *might* bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18). But we are not *actually* made rich or partakers of the blessing of Abraham, nor brought to God, until we repent and believe. As we must distinguish between the impetration and the application of the atonement, so also must we between the grace of God *decreeing*, and the *execution* of the decree of His grace. The “all spiritual blessings” of Ephesians 1:3 include regeneration, yet none are regenerate until effectually called by God.

“We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10) *imperatively*, for God has accepted Christ’s ransom; yet He does not apply it till faith be exercised by us. Reconciliation, redemption, and justification are alike the results of Christ’s satisfaction, the blessings which He purchased for His people; but they are only bestowed upon them when they are personally reconciled to God. “God the Father justifies, through the Son, by the Spirit, who works faith to receive the same. But until those things meet together, our persons are not properly justified, notwithstanding Christ hath wrought out a complete righteousness” (William Bridge, 1600-1670), nor is God reconciled to us till the Spirit has wrought faith in our hearts. In the light of Romans 3:25-26, are we not fully warranted in saying that Christ is set forth a propitiation through faith in His blood that God might be holy, and yet the Reconciler of him who ceases to defy His authority and sues for mercy through the Lord Jesus.

Though the governmental requirements of God demand that the sinner end his revolt before He will be reconciled to him, that by no means implies any doubt of Christ’s satisfaction securing its designed effects. The atonement has done very much more than remove legal obstacles which previously stood in the way of friendship between God and men, or opened the door for Him to bestow peace and pardon upon all who would accept them, as the Arminian speaks; it has absolutely *guaranteed* the salvation of all for whom it was made. So far from the word “might” in the passages quoted above denoting uncertainty, it is expressive of design and intimates the sure consequence that follows from Christ’s sacrifice. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* so well puts it: “To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same,” where the word “redemption” is used—as it often is in Scripture—as including all the blessings which it was the immediate object of Christ’s death to procure [Chapter VIII, Section VIII.].

That there is a human side to the Evangelical system by no means introduces an element of uncertainty into it or jeopardises its success. “But he [God] is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). The Arminian comes far short of the full truth when he says, “All was done on Christ’s part which was necessary to *make possible* the reconciliation and pardon of sinners, and it is now left with them whether they will receive or reject the Gospel offer”; and that “since God has constituted man a moral agent, He requires his voluntary co-operation.” Christ’s sacrifice has *made certain* the reconciliation and redemption of all for whom it was offered, for it ensured that He would “see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11). Christ’s impetration secured an infallible provision for the effectual application—namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit, who, by His invincible operations, should regenerate each of Christ’s “seed” and work saving repentance and faith in them. Though eternal life, repentance, and faith be the “gifts” of God, they are also the *fruits* of Christ’s atonement, and are conferred upon all in whose room He suffered and died.

Instead of merely opening a door of salvation for the whole of Adam’s posterity to enter if they feel disposed to, the atoning work of Christ has effectually secured the actual salvation of all the people of God, for by the wis-

dom of the divine counsels and the power of the Spirit, they are brought to gladly concur with God's will, and put their trust in the blood of the Lamb. Nevertheless, God still enforces the righteous requirements of His government and treats with men according to their responsibility, sending forth His ambassadors to charge them with their wickedness, bidding them to be reconciled to God, and assuring them of His gracious acceptance upon their ceasing to fight against Him. Before the sinner can enjoy the benefits of Christ's death, he must consent to return to the duty of the Law and live in obedience to God, for He will not pardon him while he continues to live in rebellion against Him. The Gospel calls upon men to repent of their sins, forsake their idols, and enter into solemn covenant with God, yielding themselves up unreservedly to Him, to henceforth live unto His glory.

The work of the evangelist is clearly defined: the O.T. precedes the New, the ministry of John the Baptist went before that of Christ, the substance of Romans 1 to 3 is to be preached ere the truth of Romans 4 and 5 is proclaimed. His first duty is to preach the Moral Law, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20): its requirements, its strictness, its spirituality, and its curse, so that his hearers may be brought to realise their guilty and lost condition. Coupled with this preaching of the Law must be a presentation of the character of the Lawgiver and His claims upon the creatures of His hand: that He is sovereign Lord, demanding unqualified submission to His will; that He is ineffably holy, hating all sin and iniquity; that He is inflexibly just and "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7), and will yet judge every man according to his works. Conviction of sin, by the application of the Law to the conscience, is the first step in the progress by which men are led to take hold of God's covenant. Peace with God, which the covenant established, will be sought and prized by none except those who are conscious of their guilt and dread the displeasure and vengeance of the Judge of all the earth.

The second duty of the evangelist is to preach the Gospel; and that, in such a manner that he neither contradicts, nor weakens what is pointed out in the preceding paragraph—though complementing it. He is to show that the principal design of God in sending His Son here was to magnify the Law, to manifest His detestation of sin, to exhibit His justice; all of which was solemnly seen at the cross. He is then to open the wondrous *grace of God* in giving His Son to execute His mission and perform His work, not only for the glory of God, but the good of sinners. He is to show the amazing thing is that God takes the initiative; that in Christ, *He* makes the advances; that by Christ, provision is made for the healing of the breach; and that He sends forth His servants to make overtures of peace, bidding sinners, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20)—to be converted, to repent of their sins, abandon their wicked ways, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk according to His precepts.

It is the duty of the evangelist to show that though Christ is ready to be the Friend of sinners, yet He will not be the Minister of sin; but rather maintains the honour and interests of the Father at every point. His call is: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat 11:28)—that is, "Come unto Me all ye that have in vain sought satisfaction in gratifying self and partaking of the pleasures of sin, and are now weighed down with burdened consciences and a sense of the deserved wrath of God." "Take my yoke upon you...and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat 11:29)—that is, "Own My scepter, surrender to My lordship, walk in obedience to My commandments, and rest of soul shall be your portion." The One who made satisfaction to God tells us the benefits of it are received only through our believing (Joh 3:16), and *that* is an act which principally respects the *will*. To believe is to "receive" Christ (Joh 1:12) as He is offered in the Gospel: to receive a whole Christ, to be our Prophet, Priest, and King.

The work of the pastor or teacher is to further instruct those who *have responded* to the message of the evangelist. He is to show that as God out of Christ was an offended and threatening God, God in Christ is an appeased and promising God. He is to make it clear that the reason why those who responded to the call and appeal of the evangelist was not because they were in themselves wiser or better than those who reject it, but that it was God who made them to differ (1Co 4:7). That God did so first, by choosing them in Christ before the foundation of the world; second, by giving them as sheep to the good Shepherd for Him to save; third, by causing the Holy Spirit to bring them from death unto life, illumine their understandings, convict them of their lost estate, and make them willing to receive Christ. Thus they have no cause for boasting, but every reason to ascribe *all* the glory unto the Triune God.

Should the young preacher say, I am not yet quite clear in my mind, especially does the doctrine of election puzzle me as to exactly how I should address the unsaved. Neither election nor particular redemption should in anywise cramp your style. Your commission is to preach the Gospel to "every creature" you can reach, and the Gospel is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*" (1Ti 1:15); and therefore, you are warranted in telling your hearers that there is a Saviour for every sinner out of Hell who feels his need of Him and is willing to comply with His terms. Your first business is to show him his *need* of Christ and count upon the Spirit's making your efforts effectual, assured that God's Word shall not return unto Him void, whether or no you are permitted to see its fruits. But if you are granted the privilege of seeing some comply with Christ's terms, then you may know that they

are members of that Church which Christ loved and gave Himself for, and that the Spirit has now vitally united them to Him.

The evangelist's message is that there is salvation in Christ for all who receive Him as He is offered in the Gospel and put their trust in Him. Though Christ purchased reconciliation and justification for all His people, yet they do not receive the same until they repent and believe. God is willing to be on terms of amity with the sinner, yet He will not be so until the sinner submit to those terms. Christ has perfectly made peace with God, so that no other ransom or sacrifice is required, yet none are admitted into it until they make their peace with God. God has appointed a *connection*—a moral and holy one—between the blessings purchased by Christ and the actual conveyance of them to His people. Though Christ died in order to procure Heaven for them by His merits, He also died to procure for them the regenerating operations of His Spirit to prepare them for Heaven. The test or evidence of our compliance with God's terms is a life of voluntary obedience: "As many as *walk* according to this rule, peace be on *them*, and mercy" (Gal 6:16)—"mercy" toward their defects.

HUMILITY

A humble man can come to no harm; he will be ever trusting in the Lord, because he finds nothing in himself to trust in, while he gives great glory to God by trusting much in Him. God gives him great grace, and this is to keep alive an abiding sense of what he is in himself: to show him his ignorance and helplessness, to open to him daily more of the mystery of iniquity, to discover to him the stirrings of corruption, which others feel not, and make him sensible of these, even in duties and ordinances, that he may loath himself and his very best works. These are the fruits of true grace, and he that is under the teachings of the Holy Spirit will abound in them. The more God does in the heart, the more He humbles it. The great design of His grace is to bring the proud sinner low, and then to *keep him low*.

When He hath brought us low, we do not like to be kept there, we want to get up again: our foolish desire is that He may do something in us for which we may have a good opinion of ourselves; and so with this thought, we are apt to wish, "O that I were more holy! O that I could pray better! O that I was more spiritual in duties! O that I was thankful enough!" If you could come to the true nature of these wishes (specious as they appear), you would find them spring from the secret workings of a proud, self-righteous spirit; take off their cloak of holiness, and their meaning is this: "I wish God would give me something for which I might be pleased with myself." If this was the case, would not the eyes be turned inward upon this very good self, and be drawn off from looking unto Jesus?—and so far as self is made something, Christ is made nothing. You may depend upon this as one of the surest axioms of divinity: Whatsoever it be that makes you pleased with yourself, that is not true grace; and whatsoever makes you displeased with yourself, is not true grace, unless it bring you humble to Christ and make you put more trust in Him.

The Lord teach you these things practically. I have learned them by long experience. Though I know but little, yet I am getting on in Christ's school, and hope soon to be in the lowest form, for there we learn most and fastest; we there depend entirely on the teaching of our divine Master who reveals His secrets to none but babes. A new-born babe absolutely depends on the care of its parents, so must we depend on God, on Christ our Prophet and Teacher; and when we are brought thus humble, He will then make known to us what He hides from the wise and prudent. I would therefore wish you the humblest man upon earth: then, not only you may know most, but love most. He that feels his sins and miseries, his vileness and unprofitableness—with the deepest loathings of them—is in the fittest way to love Christ. If he is an experienced believer, the feelings of these sins and miseries will make Christ more precious; the more he finds of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the more will he trust in Christ's righteousness; and the more misery he knows, the more he desires salvation: all will make Jesus more dear and lovely. His own vileness sets forth Christ's grace; his unworthiness, the worthiness of the Lamb and the sufficiency of Jesus, who is *all in all*.

When you are going to measure Christ's high grace, do not get upon a mountain, but go down into a valley—lower still, to the belly of hell, from whence Jonah cried: From thence see the height of Jesus' grace, and from thence see how lovely He is. When the Spirit of Jesus is humbling you, showing you your deceitful wicked heart, and laying upon your ruined nature in all its abominable workings, has not this often discouraged you, my friend?

And instead of loving Christ more, and trusting Him more, did it not weaken your trust, and lessen your love?—and therefore, you contracted the gracious purpose of Jesus Christ. May He teach you better!—that every future sense of sin may greatly endear the Lamb of God to you, whose blood cleanseth from all sin. —*From a letter by William Romaine (1714-1795).*

OUR SEMI-JUBILEE LETTER

Upon Israel's waging a successful battle against the Philistines, Samuel set up a stone to commemorate their victory and mark where it occurred, calling the name of it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us" (1Sa 7:12). The prophet's object was twofold: First, by his action, he erected a visible and permanent memorial of the overthrow of their enemy, for that stone was designed to keep that notable even before the mind of the Nation. Second, by his words, Samuel expressed his own deep gratitude and placed the honour where it rightfully belonged, acknowledging that things had fared very differently with Israel, had not Jehovah come to their aid. At an earlier date, the Lord had wrought gloriously for His people, "They soon forgot his works" (Psa 106:13). Such is the deplorable tendency with all of us. How often do we give him occasion to say, "Do ye not yet understand, *neither remember* the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?" (Mat 16:9)!

Upon the completion of twenty-five years' editing and publishing of this magazine, we feel that we cannot do less than gratefully raise our Ebenezer and thankfully own the Lord's abounding goodness and mercy unto us. As we review the difficulties surmounted, the amount of work accomplished, the thousands of pounds God has sent in answer to prayer, the tight corners out of which we were delivered, we can but exclaim, "This is *the LORD'S doing*; it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psa 118:23). The limited space at our disposal does not permit us to give anything like a complete account of God's many gracious interpositions; we can but make a brief selection from the wondrous ways in which He has constantly undertaken for us. Nor is this an easy task, for it obliges us to make far more reference unto ourselves than we like to do. Our sole purpose therein is to magnify God's enabling grace, to testify unto His unchanging faithfulness, to demonstrate that only by His help could we have maintained this ministry; and this, in order that our Christian friends may be encouraged and their hearts drawn out to unite with us in praising Him who alone "doeth great things" (Job 5:9).

After twelve years in the pastorate, the Lord called us into Bible conference work, traveling almost all over the U.S.A., holding special meetings in many of its principal churches, preaching frequently to from one to two thousand people, and at times, lecturing before one hundred preachers. By 1921, seven of our books and numerous booklets had appeared in print, when our publisher urged us to start a monthly magazine. Having already written so much, that seemed no small order, but after spreading the matter before the Lord, and upon our publisher agreeing to look after the clerical side of the work, together we launched forth. That first year, the Lord gave us just over one thousand subscribers, and we closed with a small credit balance. Toward the close of the second year, our partner resigned at a time when we were much exercised over the virtual cessation of preaching engagements, for we were made to prove that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecc 1:18)—our messages meeting with less acceptance by professing Christians.

Neither myself nor my wife had any experience of typing, and living in a village where no typist could be hired, it looked as though the magazine would have to close down; and, shame upon himself, the writer had no hope to the contrary, and was in complete despair. But in His grace and mercy, the Lord wrought faith and hope in his wife, and as the result of her noble efforts, we moved from that village to the city of Philadelphia. There, the Lord had moved a young couple—to whom we were almost strangers—to open their home to us until we could get suitably located, the wife typing our articles and giving Mrs. Pink a few pointers, until after a while, she was able to take over. It was a most signal interposition of the Lord on our behalf: such an evident token He would have us continue with this printed ministry that from then until now, the editor's faith has never wavered that God would supply all our need.

At the beginning of 1925, the Lord indicated that He would have the editor engage in oral ministry in Australia, though we were acquainted with only one person there, with whom we had exchanged but a couple of letters. To respond unto that leading of Providence presented a task of no small dimensions; yea, one utterly beyond our own unaided powers. But again, God helped us in a manifest manner, enabling us to get sufficiently ahead with our

work so as to provide the American printer with enough manuscript for four issues, and our good friend in Philadelphia kindly undertook to address all envelopes and mail out the copies. Though almost wrecked on the voyage, the Lord landed us safely in Sydney, where we spent three and a half of our happiest and busiest years, preaching five and six times every week—often in great heat. To write so many articles for the Studies at that time and attend to all the correspondence necessitated our working most nights until 2 A.M., but the Lord sustained us, and we suffered no ill effects.

When God made it clear that the work for which He took us to Australia was finished, the editor felt it his duty to visit his aged parents, whom he had not seen for thirteen years, hoping he might be permitted to settle in England. Only one who has carried the entire responsibility of editing and publishing a monthly magazine can appreciate what it involves to arrange for it to be printed without any hiatus and for each issue to arrive promptly in the hands of its readers during a move from one side of the world to the other—to say nothing of packing and transferring a huge library such a distance. Our stay in England lasted but a few months, for though the Baptists and the Presbyterians would have opened their pulpits had we joined their denomination and the “Brethren” given us a welcome were we prepared to restrict ourselves to their circle; yet, because we felt the Lord would have us remain outside the camp and be free to mingle with His people at large, every door was closed against us. At the time, it was a sore trial; but today, we are thankful to have been kept apart “from the strife of tongues” (Psa 31:20).

In the first half of 1929, the “pillar of cloud” moved toward the U.S.A.; and once more, the arduous task of packing, a long and difficult journey, and transferring of the publication of the Studies from one country to another was undertaken. Yet again, the Lord’s gracious help failed us not; rough places were made smooth, assistance was rendered from unexpected quarters, health and strength vouchsafed for the taxing undertaking, and the magazines all posted to the readers without any break or even delay. But other trials awaited us, for we found that those who had run well twelve years previously did so no longer; and instead of enjoying happy fellowship with them, we were a thorn in their sides. We were reminded anew that “here have we no continuing city” (Heb 13:14), first having to move all our effects a distance of over two thousand miles, and later, on a distance of nearly three thousand; yet those wanderings provided opportunities for us to sow the Seed in widely separated places.

Soon after our arrival in the U.S.A., there occurred one of the greatest financial collapses that ever struck that country, being followed by an acute and protracted industrial depression, which so seriously affected the nation that for some years, there were upwards of ten million workers out of employment and without any “dole.” During those years, our faith was put to the severest test it had encountered; we were firmly resolved to cease publishing rather than contract any debt, and so were kept on our faces before Jehovah-jireh (Gen 22:14), looking to Him for the needed funds. Nor did He fail us; though more than once after promptly paying our printer’s bill, we were left with only a few shillings in hand. 1930 was our most trying year: on the morning of Nov. 30th (the day our financial year closes), we lacked \$1:75 (7/-); and there was nothing in the post! There was an afternoon delivery, though it scarcely ever brought us anything; but that afternoon, there was one letter, and it had \$3 in it, so we closed with a credit balance of 5/-. Of course we did: God never confounds those who confidently rely upon Him!

In the autumn of 1934, we returned to Great Britain, where we were now virtually strangers—the editor having spent almost all of the previous twenty-five years in other lands, and his wife being a Kentuckian. We had not a single Christian relative or old friend in the British Isles. During the next two years, we moved twice—a distance of five hundred miles on each occasion—before we settled down in Hove, where we were privileged to continue our devotions and studies in peace, and permitted to publish the magazine without strain; yet not without those trials and exercises of heart which God sees are so necessary for our discipline. The world over spiritual conditions were deteriorating, and as the apostasy of Christendom developed, the number of those who really desired solid food for their souls steadily diminished; and though the Lord gave us messages for our articles month by month, and caused the donations to come in so freely that we were spared any financial anxiety, yet our mailing list continued to shrink, until it reached the place where it appeared that we should soon be no longer justified in publishing for such a handful.

Today, we regard it as far from being the least of those ways in which the Lord has helped us, that, all through these years, He has continued to prepare sufficient hearts to receive His messages via our pen—especially in view of the fact that the last decade has witnessed one of the worst declensions Christendom has suffered for centuries. As a private person, having no ecclesiastical connections, without any denomination or organization behind him—and during those years, cut off from any oral ministry (where we used to meet those who welcomed spiritual literature)—we have had to look entirely to the Lord and beg Him to bring us into touch with hungry souls, and move our readers to introduce the Studies to the notice of their Christian associates. A few kind friends co-operated;

others sought to, but were unsuccessful; the majority appeared indifferent. Each year, a number were called Home, and others dropped out because displeased by our teaching; yet new ones were provided to replace them.

During 1940, we were tried in a different manner. Residing in Hove (which adjoins Brighton), part of “The Battle of Britain” was fought right over our heads, for we were only ten minutes air distance from France, where the German squadrons were assembled, and from which it was expected our coast would be invaded by their army. We lay in the direct route of the enemy bombers as they came to and from London, passing over us nightly: the warning siren was sounded at 9 or 10 p.m., and the “all clear” not until 4 to 6 a.m. An occasional one unloaded his devilish freight on Hove. At that time, there was no “shelter” within reach, and Hove had no anti-aircraft guns. The house in which we resided was a jerry-built one, incapable of resisting blast or incendiaries. On July 1st, our bedroom was machine-gunned from the air, so from July 2nd to Sept. 20th, both of us spent every night lying fully dressed on the hall-floor downstairs. Yet the whole of the second half of Vol. 19 was composed and typed out during those months, and a heavy correspondence attended to! Did not *the Lord* “help” us!

But it seems to the writer the most remarkable way in which the Lord has helped us has been in supplying the necessary Seed for the sower. Scores of the first subscribers are still on our list, and at least one hundred have received 20 out of the 25 volumes: it is therefore no small order to continue writing four or five articles each month, year after year, for the *same* readers. During this quarter of a century, almost 7,000 pages have come from our pen, comprising no less than 1,700 articles of varying lengths, averaging four pages each. Among them have been the following: on John’s Gospel, 72 articles; on Exodus, 72; on Hebrews, 127; the Sermon on the Mount, 65; the Life of David, 96; of Elijah, 36, of Elisha, 30. Doctrinal articles have been on: The Atonement, 24; Justification, 10; Sanctification, 34; Election, 24; Impotency of Man, 24; Perseverance of Saints, 26; Reconciliation, 36; The divine Covenants, 50; The Antichrist, 22; Union and Communion, 25; Dispensationalism, 18; The Law, 21; The Sabbath, 19; Faith, 18; Assurance, 14; Profiting from the Word, 10.

On the Attributes of God, we wrote 24 articles; on the Glories of Christ, 41; on The Person and Work of the Spirit, 65; on The Heart, 10; Spiritual Growth, 30; Prayer, 20; and The Prayers of the Apostles, (to date) 36. That is only a list of series, though bare figures cannot convey any idea of the immense amount of work involved in preparing, nor my dear wife’s in typing them out amid her domestic duties. Many scores of others were written and typed: some on long train-journeys, others while crossing oceans. During those years, the editor was permitted to write by hand well over 20,000 letters. Now, dear reader, have we not abundant cause to raise our Ebenezer and joyfully acknowledge, “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us” (1Sa 7:12)! And will not all Christian friends give thanks unto Him for His goodness—especially that by His sustaining power, not a single article was ever delayed by sickness, nor a bill left unpaid twenty-four hours. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

The future is in the hand of Him whose we are and whom we serve. We know not what a day may bring forth, nor do we desire to. If the God of all grace has ordained this little monthly messenger shall be continued a season—be it long or short—neither man nor devil can prevent its publication, until His purpose is fulfilled. If He deigns to make further use of our unworthy pen in seeking to expose empty professors, encourage seeking sinners, comfort mourners, strengthen feeble knees, stir unto a closer and more obedient walk with God, and endeavour to lead some of His people into a better-balanced apprehension of His Truth: then—providing we earnestly seek fresh supplies of grace and Christian friends continue to hold up our hands by prayer—without a shadow of doubt, the requisite strength and wisdom will be vouchsafed us, needed funds sent in, sufficient readers supplied, and our Printer moved to continue printing for us.

We are very sorry that several of this year’s issues were so late, and that the September and October ones were unusually delayed; and we thank our friends for being so patient in refraining from writing to inquire the reason why their copies had not arrived. Our Printers wrote us on October 18th: “We have not been able to obtain the necessary paper as heretofore. License and order for the paper have now been in for almost four months, but conditions are very bad; in fact, they are worse than in 1940.” May we make two comments upon this: First, possibly the Lord has permitted the delays to bring home to our friends in the U.S.A. just *how bad* conditions are in Great Britain. Second, to make clear the need of definite and *united prayer* that God will provide our Printers with everything needful for the “Studies.”

May we also point out that in these days when so many “workers” have become *shirkers*, our Printers (like many other business firms) are heavily handicapped by absenteeism. Moreover, they are printing this magazine as a *favour to us*, as an old and privileged customer—and not for any profit they make from the work, for the job is too small, and the special price they make is too low (though we now pay them double the amount we did in 1910) to allow them scarcely any margin. Hence, there are times when our little monthly may justly be shelved for a week or two while they work on a more important order. In the past, those who had sent us a donation for the year were

warranted to expect their copies to arrive promptly. But conditions have sadly deteriorated, and the reader should no longer complacently assume his copies *will* arrive in due course. He needs to pray for God to make it possible for each issue to be printed!

Nor do we expect things to improve, or conditions become easier: rather, the reverse. But if in the course of the year, the reader receives all twelve issues—even though at *irregular* intervals—he should be grateful. Many are praying for the editor and for God’s blessing on this work, for which we are deeply thankful. Now the time has come for them to also supplicate God that He will continue giving our Printers a heart to do this work and supply them with labour and paper. Delay will not be our fault. The whole of the first six copies for 1947 are now ready for the Printers, and the January and February issues are already in their hands. But let not even English readers expect to receive them earlier than late February. The 1946 bound volume will be available *D.V.* for 7/6 (\$1.75) post paid, though probably not much before March 1st.

If it be the good pleasure of our God that this printed ministry go on a while longer—as some hundreds of our readers ardently desire and as we certainly hope it may—then doubtless further trials and testings await us. But if we seek grace to endure, and the Lord deigns to sanctify them unto us, we shall be the gainers, and not the losers. He changes not, and His faithfulness and goodness to us in the past is a sure earnest of His continued lovingkindness. The more difficult things are for any of us, the better opportunity do they afford to prove the sufficiency of our God. O that to the mercies of the past quarter of a century this favour too may be granted: that if permitted to publish, at the close of each remaining year, we may be able to raise a fresh Ebenezer. And when the hour of departure from this scene arrives, may we be found still leaning on the everlasting arms as we are conducted to that Place where we shall behold the King in His beauty and exclaim, “Worthy is the Lamb” (Rev 5:12).—*With hearty Christian greeting, yours by divine mercy, A. W. and V. E. Pink.*

APPENDICES

About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library republishes the *Studies* beginning with the year 1934, available for download worldwide, and mailing three issues each quarter by free subscription in North America. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: www.chapellibrary.org/studies

Other literature: www.chapellibrary.org/literature/title-catalog

Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished in paperbacks by several sources. *Chapel Library* offers the following at the time of this printing:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| - The Sovereignty of God | 176 pages |
| - Comfort for Christians | 79 pages |
| - Profiting from the Word | 96 pages |
| - Seven Sayings of the Savior | 94 pages |

- Spiritual Union and Communion	175 pages
- The Attributes of God	105 pages
- The Doctrine of Human Depravity	241 pages
- The Doctrine of Revelation	214 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 1	190 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 2	173 pages
- The Holy Spirit	196 pages

Biography of A.W. Pink

by Erroll Hulse

Concerning Calvinism⁵ and Arminianism⁶ during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced *Theosophy*, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! "Lucifer" was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur's character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink's conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur, however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had

⁵ **Calvinism** – the doctrinal system developed from the teachings of the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), holding that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the "doctrines of grace"; these doctrines were the response of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) to the Arminians' remonstrance (protest) and are commonly known by the acronym TULIP.

⁶ **Arminianism** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

been founded by D. L. Moody⁷ in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur's decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently suited to this kind of ministry. Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. *Studies in the Scriptures* had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the *Studies*. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

2. Pink's Experience in Australia

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia

⁷ D. L. Moody (1837-1899) – American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts (now the Northfield Mount Hermon School), the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Publishers.

was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep *Studies in the Scriptures* going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people “like a magnet,” and that he preached the “whole counsel of God’s Word,” and was capable of preaching a sermon “from every word of the text.”

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, “never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ’s vineyard.”⁸

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on “Human Responsibility.” Sadly, Pink did not realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a statement that they agreed unanimously *not* to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink’s Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink’s wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain *Studies in the Scriptures* by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism.⁹ Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

3. Impact of Pink’s Writing Ministry

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical *Studies in the Scriptures*, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and ’70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink’s writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (*Sovereignty of God*, *Life of Elijah*, and *Profiting from the Word*) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink’s books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in Methodism

⁸ *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, by Iain H. Murray, *The Banner of Truth Trust*, p 49

⁹ **hyper-Calvinism** – the doctrinal error that holds men need not evangelize, since God will save His elect children with or without the means of preaching the Word. This represents only one side of biblical truth; the other is that God is pleased to use human instruments as means to His work, and the preaching of the Word is uniquely marked out for this purpose (2Ti 4:2; 2Ti 3:16; Mat 28:19).

grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, “Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century.”¹⁰

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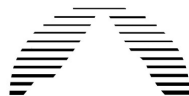
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¹⁰ *ibid.*