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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

CONTENTS

Ignorance and Knowledge	2
The Prayers of the Apostles	5
<i>4. Romans 15:5-7</i>	
The Mission and Miracles of Elisha	9
<i>16. Tenth Miracle - part 3</i>	
The Doctrine of Reconciliation	13
<i>2. Its Distinctions</i>	
Spiritual Growth or Christian Progress.....	17
<i>3b. Its Necessity</i>	

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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

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IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

"Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" (Eccl. 11:2). These words enunciate a broad principle which is of general application, intimating our ignorance of future providences. But they also have a more specific meaning, as may be seen from their setting. The context contains an exhortation unto generosity, cultivating acts of benevolence. For the husbandman to cast bread-corn, which he could ill spare, upon a marshy soil, especially if covered by waters; might seem improvident and unwise, but assurance is given him that he shall find it again after many days: the autumn harvest will vindicate his springtide faith and labor. From this a practical application is made: "Give a portion to seven and also to eight." Do not selfishly hoard up what God has so freely bestowed on you, but distribute a goodly proportion among those who are not so well provided for. Consider the poor and needy and minister to their wants: think not it will all be wasted upon them and come to nought.

But unbelief may object, The outlook is far from being propitious and therefore I should lay up more and more against my own "rainy day." The miser says, I know not what the future has in store for me, so it is the part of prudence to accumulate whilst I may. No, says our passage, we should reason the very opposite: "*For* thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Since thou knowest not how calamitous the times may shortly be, then do all possible in the present and you will not be the loser in the future. The instability of human affairs and the possibility that our riches may soon take to themselves wings and fly away, furnishes a sound reason why we should do as much good with them as we can while we have them, and leave the outcome with God. He will not suffer the liberal soul to starve. He who has been wisely charitable to the indigent is likely to be the recipient of most kindness if an evil day should come upon him; but the miser makes no friends and is left alone when misfortune strikes.

The exhortations of Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2 are by no means to be restricted unto the disbursement of temporal charity: they have also a spiritual import, with a particular application unto the minister of the Gospel. As Faith is needed by the farmer in order to the discharge of his duties, so it is with the evangelical husbandman. He must not be discouraged by the lack of response he meets with and the absence of immediate fruitage to his labours. If he be faithful in casting the Bread of life upon the human "waters" (see Rev. 17:15), particularly "*thy* Bread"—those portions you have personally received from God and which have proved a blessing to your own soul—the sure promise is "thou shalt find it again after many days." Therefore be not slack or exclusive but "give a portion to seven and also to eight," for if you prayerfully seek opportunities and carefully observe the openings Providence makes you will be brought into touch with hungry souls. There is many a starved sheep wandering about to-day who will deeply appreciate the ministrations of one of Christ's shepherds.

Not only so, but "for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" supplies a further incentive to fidelity. Things are indeed bad enough to-day, but the shrewdest is quite incapable of foreseeing how much worse they may become. When the restraining hand of God is removed, lawlessness abounds with increasing rapidity and intensity. When the sluice-gates are open wickedness floods the whole land, carrying everything before it. When God speaks in judgment to a nation and it refuses to heed His voice His judgments increase in severity, as did His plagues upon Egypt of old. Therefore it is the part of wisdom to redeem the time and make the most of the privileges which are ours to-day. Work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work (John 9:4). Since we have no guarantee about the future "upon the earth" utilise to the full the present.

"Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." A generation ago there were men with spiritual discernment who seeing the trend of things then, gave warning that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse." Those with anointed eyes perceived the blight which had attacked the churches, the decay of vital godliness and family worship, the children growing up without any religious and little moral instructions. They knew that such an awful "falling away" must result in fearful consequences. Even statesmen and unregenerate leaders with natural acumen had dark forebodings of what lay ahead for the world: "Men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But who among the most foreseeing, or even the most pessimistic, would have believed that things should come to the awful pass they now have!—the Spirit largely withdrawn, morality almost disappeared, the lower classes getting things more and more under their control, the whole world in a state of chaos, the vials of God's wrath being poured out on the earth. And the end is not yet, not has the worst by any means been reached. The next generation will reap a still more horrible harvest from what is now being sown.

Black indeed is the outlook for this poor world. But over against this “thou *knowest not* what evil shall be upon the earth,” let us place “Yet surely *I know* that it shall be well with them that fear God” (Eccl. 8:12). Glorious contrast! Blessed assurance! No matter what may yet come “upon the earth” it shall not harm the saints. Though it may overturn their carnal plans and unpleasantly affect their circumstances, yet it shall not injure their souls. Rather will such temporal afflictions be sanctified unto them, to the drawing of their affections more and more unto things above, thereby causing them to regard more lightly and hold more loosely the things that perish. The plagues which God sent upon Egypt eventuated in the deliverance of His people from the house of bondage. The casting of the Hebrews into Babylon’s furnace issued in the burning off of their bonds. However long protracted the Divine judgments upon an apostate Christendom, however much they may yet increase in their severity, yet “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

“Surely I know that *it shall be well* with them that fear God.” This is the knowledge of faith and not of reason. It is the assurance that fills the soul of him who rests with implicit confidence on the Divine promises. God has said to His covenant people “I will not turn away from them to do them good” (Jer. 32:40). He has not, [even] in the darkest hours of history. When His wrath burst upon the antediluvians, shelter was provided for Noah and his family in the ark. When the long-protracted drought was upon Samaria with its attendant famine, the Lord provided for Elijah by the brook Kerith, and later in the home of the Zarephath widow. When Jezebel determined to stamp out the worship of Jehovah and slew His prophets, one hundred of them were hid in caves and fed with bread and water (1 Kings 18:13). When the Dragon “persecuted the woman” which brought forth the Man child, “a place was provided for her in the wilderness.” And when the Serpent sought to destroy her with a flood of water, “the earth helped” her by opening its mouth and swallowing up the flood (Rev. 12:13-16).

But let due attention be paid to the description here given of those to whom this assurance belongs: “I know that it shall be well with them that *fear God*, which fear before Him.” The added clause renders it most emphatic, that there may be no mistaking their identification. It is not merely those who make a religious profession and associate themselves with His saints, but only the ones who genuinely fear God. To “fear God” is to have a reverential awe of His authority, a filial veneration of His majesty, a heart realization of His omniscience and omnipresence, a soul subjection to His scepter. Those who fear God are regulated by His revealed will, have respect to His commandments, are afraid of displeasing Him. Those who fear God will not trifle with Him or deliberately act the part of hypocrites. Concerning them, and them only may it be said, “*Surely* I know it shall be well with them”—well for time and for eternity.—AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

4. *Romans 15:5-7*

Under the New Covenant there is no longer any distinction in the sight of God between different kinds of “meat” nor of the sacred “days” set apart for religious exercise that obtained under the Jewish economy. Some of the early Christians perceived this clearly, others either did not or would not acknowledge such liberty. This difference of opinion bred dissensions and disrupted fellowship. To remove this evil and to promote good the apostle laid down certain rules which may be summed up thus. First, “let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (14:5) and not blindly swayed by the opinions or customs of others. Second, be not censorious and condemn not those who differ from you (v. 13). Third, be not occupied with mere trifles, but concentrate on the essentials (v. 17). Fourth, follow after those things which make for peace and mutual edification (v. 19) and quibble not over matters which are to no profit. Fifth, make not an ostentatious display of your liberty, nor exercise the same to the injury of others (vv. 19-21).

There is great variety and diversity among the saints. This is true of their natural make-up, temperament, manner, and thus in their likeableness or unlikeableness. It also holds good spiritually: Christians have received varying degrees of light, measures of grace, and different gifts. One reason why God has ordered things thus is to try their patience, give opportunity for the exercise of love, and occasion to display meekness and forbearance. All have their blemishes and infirmities. Some are proud, others peevish; some are censorious and others backboneless, and in various ways difficult to get on with. Opinions differ and customs are by no means uniform. Much grace is needed if fellowship is to be maintained. If the rules mentioned above had been rightly interpreted and genuinely acted upon through the centuries many dissensions had been prevented and much that has marred the Christian testimony in public avoided.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not please ourselves” (15:1). The “then” is argumentative, pointing a conclusion drawn from the principles laid down in the foregoing chapter—for some understanding of which the preceding article was necessary. Let it be duly noted that the pronouns are in the *plural* number: it was not so much individual differences of opinion and conduct, with the personal ill feelings they bred, which the apostle had been reprehending, but rather the development of the same collectively into party spirit and sectarian prejudice, so that the Christian company would be rent asunder—this too must be borne in mind when making a present-day application. The “weak” here signifies those who had a feeble grasp of that freedom which Christ has obtained for His people, as a reference to 14:1 makes clear; the “strong” those who have a better apprehension of the extent of their Christian privileges from the restrictions which had been imposed by the ceremonial law and the traditions of men—such as the austerities of the Essenes.

The Greek word here rendered “bear” signifies “to take up.” It was used of porters carrying luggage, assisting travelers. It is found again in Galatians 6:2, only the apostle there mentions “burdens” rather than infirmities: see also Luke 14:27, Romans 11:18. This term also helps to determine the interpretation of what is in view, and thus fixes the proper application. We are not here enjoined to bear *with* the petty whims or scruples of one another, but to render practical aid to those who lag behind the rest. A “burden” is something which is apt to cause its carrier to halt or faint by the way, incapacitating him in his pilgrimage. The strong are bidden to help these weak ones. As charity requires us to ascribe their weaknesses to lack of understanding, it becomes the duty of the better instructed to seek to *enlighten* them. No doubt it would be easier and nicer to leave them alone, but we are “not to please ourselves.” Apparently it was at this point the Gentile believers had failed, for while the Jewish Christians were aggressive in seeking to impose their view on others, the Gentiles seem to have adopted a negative attitude.

It is ever thus: fanatics and extremists are not content to deprive themselves of things which God has not prohibited, but are zealous in endeavoring to press their will upon all, whereas others who use them temperately are content to mind their own business and leave in peace those who differ from them. Christians who drink wine and smoke tobacco in moderation do not go about seeking to induce others to do the same, yet many of their brethren who are total abstainers take it upon them to pester these with their fads and say the most uncharitable things about those who refuse to adopt their whims. It is not the use of wine but the intemperate abuse of the same which Scripture forbids: see John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 3:8. It was the ex-pharisees “which believed” who insisted that “it was necessary to circumcise” converted

Gentiles and “to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5) and thereby bring them into bondage—a thing which the apostle Paul steadfastly resisted and condemned.

In the passage before us the Roman saints were exhorted to cease maintaining their negative attitude, however much easier and more congenial it might be to continue in the same. “And not to please ourselves” (v. 1) signifies not an abstention from something they liked, but the performing of a duty which they disliked—how men do turn the things of God upside down! This is quite evident from the preceding part of the verse, where the “strong” (or better instructed) were bidden to “bear the infirmities of the weak”: how would their abstaining from certain “meats” be a compliance with *such* an injunction? No, it was not something they were told to forgo out of respect for others’ scruples, but a *bearing* of their “infirmities,” a rendering assistance to their fellow-pilgrims (Gal. 6:2) which they were called upon to do. And how was this to be done? Well, *what were* their “infirmities”? Why, self-imposed abstinences because of ignorance of the Truth. Thus it was the duty of the Gentile Christians to expound unto their Jewish brethren “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

Try and place yourself in *their* position, my reader. Imagine yourself to be Lydia or the Philippian jailor. All your past life had been in the darkness and idolatry of heathenism, when unsought by you the sovereign grace of God opened your heart to receive the Gospel. You are now a new creature in Christ Jesus, and have been enabled to perceive your standing and liberty in Him. Living next door to you, perhaps, is a family of converted Jews. All their past lives they have read the Scriptures and worshiped the true God, and though they have received Christ as the promised Messiah and as their personal Savior, yet they are still in bondage to the restrictions of the Mosaic Law. You marvel at their dullness, but consider it none of your concern to interfere. And now you receive a copy of this Epistle and ponder 15:1. You now see that you *have* a duty toward your Jewish sister and brother, that God bids you make the effort to pass on to her or him the light He has granted you. The task is distasteful: perhaps so, but we are “not to please ourselves”!

That what we have sought to set forth above brings out, or at least points to, the real meaning of verse 1 is unequivocally established by the next verse. “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification” (Rom. 15:2). This is obviously the amplification in positive form of the negative clause in the verse before. To “edify” a brother—here called “neighbor” according to Jewish terminology!—is to build him up in the Faith, and the appointed means for *that* is to instruct him by and enlighten him with the Truth. It should be carefully noted that this “pleasing of our neighbor” is no mere yielding to his whims, but an industrious effort to promote his knowledge of Divine things, particularly in the privileges which Christ has secured for him. It may prove a thankless task, but it “ought” to be undertaken, for concern for his good requires it. If he resents your efforts and insults you, *your* skirts are clear and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have honestly attempted to discharge your duty.

“For even Christ pleased not Himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me” (v. 3). This supplies further proof of the soundness of our interpretation of the previous verses. The meaning of “we...ought...not to please ourselves” is placed beyond all uncertainty by what is here said of our Lord. In His case it signified something vastly different than *abstaining* from things that He *liked*, and certainly the very opposite of attempting to ingratiate Himself in the esteem of men by flattering their prejudices. No, rather was Christ in all things regulated by the Divine Rule: not His own will, but the will of His Father was whatever governed Him. Not attempting to obtain the approval of His fellows, but rather seeking of their “good” and the “edification” of His brethren was what uniformly actuated Him. And in the exercise of such disinterested charity, so far from being appreciated for the same, He brought upon Himself “reproaches.” And if the disciple follows His example he must not expect to fare any better.

In his closing remarks on Romans 14, Charles Hodge pointed out: “It is often necessary to assert our Christian liberty at the expense of incurring censure and offending good men, in order that right principles of duty may be preserved. Our Savior consented to be regarded as a Sabbath-breaker and even a ‘wine-bibber’ and ‘friend of publicans and sinners’; but wisdom was justified of her children. Christ did not in those cases see fit to accommodate His conduct to the rules of duty set up and conscientiously regarded as correct by those around Him. He saw that more good would arise from a practical disregard of the false opinion of the Jews as to the manner in which the Sabbath was to be kept and as to the degrees of intercourse which was allowed with wicked men, than from concession to their prejudices.” Better then to give offence or incur obloquy than sacrifice principle or disobey God.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” This statement seems to be made for a double reason. First, to inform the saints that though the Mosaic law was abrogated and the Old Testament treated of a past dispensation, yet they must not conclude therefrom that it was now out of date. The uniform use which the New Testament writers made of it, frequently appealing to it in proof of what they advanced, proves otherwise: all of it is intended for our instruction to-day, and the examples of piety contained therein will stimulate us—see James 5:10. Second, a prayerful pondering of the Old Testament will nourish that very grace which will most need to be exercised when complying with the foregoing exhortations—“patience,” in dealing with those who differ from us; it will minister “comfort” to us if we are reviled for performing our duty.

“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.” By his example the apostle here teaches us that if we are to discharge this duty acceptably unto God we must have recourse unto *prayer*. He alone can grant success in it, and unless His aid be definitely and earnestly sought, failure is almost certain to be the outcome. There are few things which the majority of people more resent than to have their religious beliefs and ways called into question. Something more is involved than an imperfectly-informed understanding: there is prejudice of heart to be overcome as well, for ‘convince a man against his will, and he is of the same opinion still.’ Moreover much grace is required on the part of the one who undertakes to deal with the mistaken scruples of another, lest, acting in the energy of the flesh, he gives place to the Devil, sowing seeds of discord and causing “a root of bitterness” to spring up, and thus makes matters worse rather than better. Such grace needs to be personally and fervently sought.

There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge. There is an ardor which is merely of nature and not prompted by the Holy Spirit. If then it should become my duty to pass on to a brother a measure of that light which God has granted me and which I have reason to believe he does not enjoy, I need to ask help from Him for the execution of such a task. I need to ask Him to impress my heart afresh with the fact that *I* have nothing but what I received from Him (1 Cor. 4:7) and to beg Him to subdue the workings of pride, that I may approach my brother in a humble spirit. I need to ask for wisdom, that I may be guided in what to say. I need to ask for love that I may truly seek the good of the other. I need to be shown when it is the right time to approach him. Above all, I need to ask that God’s glory may be my paramount concern. Furthermore, I need to pray that it may please God to go before me and prepare the soil for the seed, that He will graciously meek the heart of my brother, remove the prejudice, and make him receptive to the Truth.

Observe the particular character in which the apostle addressed the Deity: as “the God of patience and consolation.” He eyed those attributes in God which were most suited to the petition he presented, namely, that He would grant “like-mindedness” where there was a difference in judgment and mutual forbearance was called for. It was the grace of patience that was needed among dissenting brethren: “consolation” too was required to bear the infirmities of the weak: as another has said, “If the heart be filled with the comforts of the Almighty it will be as oil to the wheels of Christian charity.” The Father is here contemplated as “the God of patience and consolation” because He is the Author of these graces, because He requires the exercise of the same in us (Eph. 5:1), and because we are to constantly seek from Him the quickening and strengthening of them. In the preceding verse we are shown that “patience and comfort” are conveyed to believing souls through the Scriptures: they are, as it were, the conduit-pipe; but here we are taught that God Himself is the Fountain-head of the same.

Consider now *the mercy sought*: that the God of patience and consolation would “grant you to be like-minded one to another.” As Charles Hodge rightly pointed out, like-mindedness here “does not signify unanimity of opinion but harmony of feeling.” This should be apparent to those who possess no knowledge of the Greek: how can “babes” in Christ be expected to have the same measure of light on spiritual things as mature Christians! No, the apostle’s petition went deeper than that the saints might see eye to eye on every detail—which is neither to be expected nor desired in this life: it was that affection one toward another might obtain, even where difference of opinion upon minor matters persisted. The thing requested was, that quarreling should cease, all ill feelings be set aside, patience and forbearance be exercised, and mutual love prevail. It was that such a state of unity might obtain that notwithstanding difference of view, they might enjoy together the delights and advantages of Christian fellowship.

“According to Christ Jesus” (v. 5). The margin gives “after the example of”: this is certainly included, yet not to be restricted thereto. We regard this like-mindedness “according to Christ Jesus” as having a

threefold force. First, according to the *precept*, command, or law of Christ: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35); "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Second, according to His *example*. Remember how He bore with the dullness and bickering of His disciples. Remember how He stooped to wash their feet. Third, by making Him "the Centre" of their unity: "Agree in the Truth, not in any error. It was a cursed concord and harmony of those who were of one mind to give their power and strength to the Beast (Rev. 17:13): that was not a like-mindedness *according* to Christ, but *against* Christ" (Matthew Henry). Thus, "according to Christ Jesus" signifies in a Christian manner. Let the reader ponder carefully Philippians 2:2-5, for it furnishes an inspired comment on our present verse.

Yet there is such a fullness in the words of Scripture that the threefold meaning of "according to Christ Jesus" given above by no means exhausts their scope. They need also to be considered in the light of what immediately precedes and pondered as a part of this prayer. The apostle is making request that God would cause this Christian company (composed of such different elements as believing Jews and Gentiles) to be "like-minded," which, of course, implies that they were not so—Titus 3:3 describes what we are by nature. Observe the blessing sought, however desirable, was not something to be claimed, but which it was prayed that God would "grant": by adding "according to Christ Jesus" we may therefore understand those words as the ground of appeal—grant it according to the *merits* of Christ. Finally, we may also regard this clause as a plea: grant it for the *honor* of Christ—that unity and concord may obtain for the glory of His name.

"That ye may with one mind, one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6). This is *the grand end* in view: that such brotherly love may be exercised, such mutual forbearance shown, such concord and unity maintained, that the spirit of worship be not quenched. The One who will not receive from me an offering while I be alienated from my brother (Matt. 5:23,24) will not accept the praise of a company of believers where there are divisions among them. Something more than coming together under the same roof and joining in the same ordinance is required (1 Cor. 11:18-20). There cannot truly be "one mouth" unless there first be "one mind." Tongues which are used to backbite one another in private cannot blend together in singing God's praises. The "Father" is mentioned here as an emphatic reminder of the *family* relationship: all Christians are His children, and therefore should dwell together in peace and amity as brethren and sisters—"of *our* [not 'the'!] Lord Jesus Christ" intensifies the same idea.

"They may be divided in their dietary views; this in itself is a small matter; but they must not be divided in their worship and praise of God. For the patient and comforted mind can join in praise with those from whom there is dissent of opinion. This is true Christian union" (James M. Stifler). "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (v. 7). This is not an exhortation to one class only, but to the "strong" and the "weak" alike. They are here bidden to ignore all minor differences, and inasmuch as Christ accepts all who genuinely believe His Gospel whether they be Jews or Gentiles, so are we to receive into fellowship and favor all whom He has received. "If He accepts men in all their weakness and without any regard to their views about secondary things, well may we" (Stifler). Thereby is God glorified, and for this we should pray and act. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

16. Tenth Miracle - part 3

In the previous chapter we emphasized the secret operations of God in inclining one and another to pay attention to the message of the little Hebrew maid: He it was who gave the hearing ear to both Naaman's wife and the king of Syria. Perhaps some have remarked, But such was not the case with the king of Israel! No, it was not, for so far from sharing her confidence and cooperating with her effort, he was skeptical and antagonistic. Therein we may perceive God's sovereignty. He does not work in all alike, being absolutely free to do as He pleases. He opens the eyes of some, but leaves others in their blindness. This is God's high and awful prerogative: "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). This is what supplies the key to God's dealings with men and which explains the course of evangelical history. Clearly is that solemn principle exemplified in the chapter before us, and we should be unfaithful as an expositor if we—as so many now do—deliberately ignored it.

"And it came to pass when the king of Israel had read the letter that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God to kill and to make alive; that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2 Kings 5:7). So utterly sceptical was Jehoram that he deemed it not worth while to send for Elisha and confer with him. The prophet meant nothing to Israel's unbelieving king, and therefore he slighted him. Perhaps this strikes the reader as strange, for the previous miracles Elisha had wrought must have been well known. One had thought his restoring of a dead child to life had thoroughly authenticated him as an extraordinary man of God. But did not the Lord Jesus publicly raise a dead man to life, and yet within a few days both the leaders of the nation and the common people clamored for His crucifixion! And is it any different in our day? Have we not witnessed providential marvels, Divine interpositions both of mercy and judgment, and what effect have they had on our evil generation? Jehoram's conduct is easily accounted for: "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), and that enmity evidenced itself by slighting His accredited servant.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there *is* a prophet in Israel" (v. 8). The slighted Elisha pocketed his pride and communicated with the king, rightly concluding that his own feelings were not worth considering where the glory of God was concerned. "Naaman came into the land of Israel, expecting relief from a prophet of the God of Israel, and Elisha would by no means have him go back disappointed, lest he should conclude that Jehovah was like the gods of the nations, and as unable to do good or evil as they were. On the contrary he would have it known that God had 'a prophet in Israel' by whom He performed such cures as none of the heathen prophets, priests, or physicians could effect; and which were far beyond all the power of the mightiest monarchs" (Thomas Scott). The "counsel of the Lord it shall stand" whatever devices were in Jehoram's heart to the contrary (Prov. 19:21).

"The righteous are bold as a lion." Elisha not only rebuked the king for his unbelieving fears but summarily gave him instructions concerning Naaman. However unwelcome might be his interference, that deterred him not. The real servant of God does not seek to please men, but rather to execute the commission he has received from on high. It is true that the prophets, like the apostles, were endowed with extraordinary powers, and therefore they are not in all things models for us to-day; nevertheless the Gospel minister is not to cringe before any one, still less is he to take orders from human authorities. It is his duty to denounce unbelief and to proclaim that the living God is ever ready to honor Him and work wonders in response to genuine faith. As God overruled the king of Syria's misdirecting of Naaman, so He now overcame the skepticism of the king of Israel by moving him to respond to Elisha's demand—thereby demonstrating that the words of the little maid were no idle boast and her confidence in God no misplaced one.

"So Naaman came with his forces and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha" (v. 9). Naaman before the prophet's abode may be regarded as a picture of the natural man in his sins, not yet stripped of his self-righteousness, nor aware that he is entirely dependent on Divine mercy, having no title or claim to receive any favor at God's hand. The fact that he was seated in a chariot mitigated his terrible

condition not one iota. No matter how rich the apparel that covered his body, though it might hide from human view his loathsome disease, it availed nothing for the removal of it. And as the valuables he had brought with him could not procure his healing, neither can the cultivation of the most noble character nor the performance of the most praiseworthy conduct in human esteem merit the approbation of God. Salvation is wholly of Divine grace and cannot be earned by the creature: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5,6).

However much it might be in accord with the principles and sentiments which regulate fallen human nature, there was surely something most incongruous in the scene now before us. Here was a poor creature stricken with a most horrible disease, and yet we behold him seated in a chariot. Here was one smitten by a malady no physician could heal, surrounded by official pomp. Here was one entirely dependent upon the Divine bounty, yet whose horses were laden with silver and gold. Do we not behold in him, then, a representative not only of the natural man in his sins, but as filled with a sense of his own importance and bloated with pride! Such is precisely the case with each of us by nature. Totally depraved though we be, alienated from God, criminals condemned by His holy Law, our minds at enmity against Him, dead in trespasses and sins, yet until a miracle of grace is wrought within and the tumor of our pride is lanced, we are puffed up with self-righteousness, refuse to acknowledge we deserve naught but eternal punishment, and imagine we are entitled to God's favorable regard.

Not only does Naaman here fitly portray the self-importance of the natural man while unregenerate, but as hinted above he also adumbrates the fact that the sinner imagines he can gain God's approbation and purchase his salvation. The costly things which the Syrian had brought with him were obviously designed to ingratiate himself in the eyes of the prophet and pay for his cure. The following such a policy was of course quite natural, and therefore it types out what is the native thought of every man. He supposes that a dutiful regard of religious performances will obtain for him the favorable notice of God, that his fastings and prayers, church-attendance and contributing to its upkeep, will more than counterbalance his demerits. Such an insane idea is by no means confined to Buddhists and Romanists but is common to the whole human family. It is for this reason we have to be assured, "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). Spiritually speaking, every man is bankrupt, a pauper, and salvation is entirely gratis, a matter of charity.

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). This is true alike of the most cultured and the thoroughly illiterate. No amount of education or erudition fits one for the apprehension of spiritual things. Man is blind, and his eyes must be opened, before he can perceive either the glory of God and His righteous claims or his own wretchedness and deep needs. Not until a miracle of grace humbles his heart will he betake himself unto the Throne of Grace in his true character, not until the Holy Spirit works effectually within him will he come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar. It is recorded that a famous artist met with a poor tramp and was so impressed with his woe-begone appearance and condition that he felt he would make an apt subject for a drawing. He gave the tramp a little money and his card and promised him a sovereign if he would call at his house on the following day and sit while he drew his picture. The next morning the tramp arrived, but the artist's intention was defeated: the tramp had washed and shaved and so spruced himself that he was scarcely recognisable!

Similarly does the natural man act when he first attempts to respond to the Gospel call. Instead of coming to the Lord just as he is in all his want and woe, as one who is lost and undone, he supposes he must first make himself more presentable by a process of reformation. Thus he busies himself in amending his ways, improving his conduct, and performing pious exercises, unaware that Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"—to take their place in the dust before Him. What we have just been dwelling upon receives striking illustration in the chapter before us. Instead of sending Naaman direct to Elisha, Benhadad gave him a letter of introduction unto the king of Israel; and instead of casting himself on the mercy of the prophet, he sent a costly fee to pay for the healing of his commander-in-chief. We have seen the futility of his letter—the effect it had upon its recipient; now we are to behold how his lavish outlay of wealth produced no more favorable response from Elisha, for Naaman had to learn the humiliating truth that where Divine grace is concerned the millionaire stands on precisely the same level as the pauper.

Fifth, *its requirement*. "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (v. 10). As the representative of Him

who deigned to wash the feet of His disciples, the minister of the Gospel must not decline the meanest service nor despise the poorest person. Elisha has set us an example of both, for he scorned not to minister to the physical needs of Elijah by washing his hands (3:11), and refused not to help the impoverished widow (4:2). On the other hand, the servant of Christ is to be no sycophant, toadying to those of affluence, nor is he to feed the pride of the self-important. From the sequel it is evident Naaman considered that he, as a "great man," was entitled to deference, and probably felt that the prophet ought to consider a favor or honor was now being shown him. But, officially, Elisha was an ambassador of the King of kings, and with becoming dignity he let Naaman know that he was at no man's beck and call, though he failed not to inform him of the way in which healing was to be obtained.

"And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Here we see no servile obeisance nor owning of the mightiness of Naaman. The prophet did not even greet him, nor so much as go out of his house to meet him in person. Instead, he sent him a message by a servant. Ah, my reader, God is no respecter of persons, nor should His ministers be. Incalculable harm has been wrought in churches by pastors pandering to those in high places, for not only are the haughty injured thereby, but the lowly are stumbled, and in consequence the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. God will not tolerate any parading of fleshly distinctions before Him: "that *no* flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29) is the unrepeatable decision. The most eminent and gifted of this world are due no more consideration from the Most High than the street-sweeper, for "there is no difference: all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22). All alike have broken the Law, all alike are guilty before the supreme Judge, all alike must be saved by sovereign grace if they be saved at all.

But there is another way in which we may regard the prophet's conduct on this occasion: not only did he maintain his official dignity, but he evidenced personal humiliation and prudence, having his eye fixed on the glory of God. It is not that he was indifferent to Naaman's welfare: no, the fact that he sent his servant out to him with the needful directions evidenced the contrary. But Elisha knew full well that the all-important thing was not the messenger, but the message. It mattered nothing who delivered the message—himself or his servant, but it mattered everything that the God-given word should be faithfully communicated. Elisha knew full well that Naaman's expectation lay *in himself*, so like a true "man of God" he directed attention away from himself. What a needed lesson for us in this creature-exalting day. How much better would preachers serve souls and honor their Master if, thus hidden, they occupied them with the Gospel instead of with themselves. It was in this self-effacing spirit that Paul rebuked the creature-worshipping Corinthians when he said "who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" (1 Cor. 3:5). So too our Lord's forerunner who styled himself "the voice [heard but not seen!] of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23).

What was the force of "Go wash in Jordan seven times"? Let us give first a general answer in the words of another. "When Naaman stood with his pompous retinue, and with all his silver and gold at the door of Elisha, he appears before us as a marked illustration of a sinner building on his own efforts after righteousness. He seemed furnished with all that the heart could desire, but in reality all his preparations were but a useless encumbrance, and the prophet soon gave him to understand this. 'Go wash' swept away all confidence in gold, silver, raiment, retinue, the king's letter, everything. It stripped Naaman of everything, and reduced him to his true condition as a poor defiled leper needing to be washed. It put no difference between the illustrious commander-in-chief of the hosts of Syria, and the poorest and meanest leper in all the coasts of Israel. The former could do nothing less; the latter needed nothing more. Wealth cannot remedy man's ruin, and poverty cannot interfere with God's remedy. Nothing that a man has done need keep him out of heaven; nothing that he can do will ever get him in. 'Go wash' is the word in every case."

But let us consider this "Go wash" more closely and ponder it in the light of its connections. As one stricken with leprosy, Naaman pictures the natural man in his fallen estate. And what is his outstanding and distinguishing characteristic of such? Why, that he is a depraved creature, a sinner, a rebel against God. And what is sin? From the negative side, it is failure to submit to God's authority and be subject to His Law; positively, it is the exercise of self-will, a determination to please myself; "we have turned every one to *his own way*" (Isa. 53:6). If then a sinner inquires of God's servant the way of recovery, what is the first and fundamental thing which needs to be told him? Why this: that self-will and self-pleasing must cease, that he must submit himself to the will of God. And that is only another way of saying that he must be *con-*

verted, for “conversion” is a turning round, a right-about-face. And in order to conversion, *repentance* is the essential requisite (Acts 3:19), and in its final analysis “repentance” is taking sides with God against myself, judging myself, condemning myself, bowing my will to His.

Again, sin is not only a revolt against God, but a deification of self: it is a determination to gratify my own inclinations; it is saying, “I will be lord over myself.” That was the bait which the Serpent dangled before our first parents when he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit: “Ye shall be as *gods*” (Gen. 3:5). Casting off allegiance to God, man assumed an attitude of independency and self-sufficiency. Sin taking possession of his heart, he became proud, haughty, self righteous. If, then, such a creature is to be recovered and restored to God, it must necessarily be by a process of *humbling him*. The first design of the Gospel is to put down human pride, to lay man low before God. It was predicted by Isaiah when speaking of Gospel times “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down” (2:11). And again, “every mountain shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight” (40:4); and therefore did our Lord begin His sermon on the mount by saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). That was the basic truth which the prophet pressed upon Naaman: that he must abase himself before the God of Israel.

“Go wash in Jordan seven times” was but another way of saying to the conceited Syrian, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God...Cleanse your hands ye sinners and purify your hearts ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to bitterness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up” (James 4:6-10). Naaman must come down from off his high horse and take his proper place before the Most High. Naaman must descend from his “chariot” and evidence a lowly spirit. Naaman must “wash” or “bathe” as the word is often translated, in the waters of the Jordan; not once or twice but no less than seven times, and thus completely renounce self. And the requirement which God made of Naaman, my reader, is precisely the same as His demand upon you, upon me: pride has to be mortified, self-will relinquished, self-righteousness repudiated. Have we complied therewith? Have we renounced self-pleasing and surrendered to the Divine scepter? Have we given ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5) to be ruled by Him? If not, we have never been savingly converted.

In its ultimate significance, the “Go wash in Jordan seven times” had a typical import, and in the light of the New Testament there is no difficulty whatever in perceiving what that was. There is one provision, and one only, which the amazing grace of God and the wondrous love of His Son has made for the healing of spiritual lepers. It is that blessed “Fountain” which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). That holy “Fountain” had its rise at Calvary, when from the pierced side of Christ “forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34). That wondrous “Fountain” which can cleanse the foulest was provided at the incalculable cost of the crucifixion of Immanuel, and hence the washing in “Jordan” which ever speaks of death. Here, then, dear friend, is the evangelical significance of what has been before us. If you have been made conscious of your depravity, ready to deny self, willing to humble yourself into the dust before God, here is the Divine provision: a bath into which by faith you may plunge, and thereby obtain proof that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). If by grace you have already done so, then join the writer in exclaiming, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood...to Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5,6). —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

2. *Its Distinctions*

Before taking up our subject in a positive and constructive manner it seems advisable that we should endeavor to remove a misapprehension under which a number of our readers are laboring, and which requires to be cleared up before they will be in a fit condition to weigh without bias and thus be enabled to receive what we hope to present in later articles. It is for their special benefit this one is composed, and we trust that other friends will kindly bear with us if they find it rather wearisome to follow a labored discussion of that which presents no difficulty to *them*. To enter into a consideration of this particular point at such an early stage in the series will oblige us to somewhat infringe upon other aspects of our subject which will be taken up later (D.V.), but this appears necessary if we are to “clear the decks for action,” or to change the figure, if we are to rid the ground of superfluous encumbrances and fit it for a sowing of the seed.

That which presents a difficulty to those who have been brought up in some Calvinistic circles is, how can God be said to be *reconciled* to His elect, seeing that He has loved them with an everlasting and unchanging love? Much of our opening article was devoted to a particular answer to such an inquiry, but as we deem that answer far from being a satisfactory one, we shall here confine ourselves to its elucidation. To us it appears that the explanation furnished by Mr. Philpot was confused and faulty, and that it was so through failure to distinguish between things that differ—hence the title we have accorded this article. If we are to avoid becoming hopelessly muddled on this point we must discriminate sharply between what the elect are as viewed only in the eternal purpose of God, and what they are *in themselves by nature*. And further, we must carefully differentiate between God considered as their Father and God considered as the Moral Governor and *Judge* of all mankind.

That it may appear we do not advance anything in the remainder of this article which clashes with or deviates from the teaching of sound theologians in the past, we will make brief quotations from four of the best-known Puritans. “We are actually justified, pardoned and reconciled when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God may have towards us from eternity, we are under the fruits of sin till we become penitent believers” (T. Manton). In his treatise on “The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation” Thomas Goodwin (book 2, beginning of chapter 1) points out: “There are two different states or conditions which the elect of God, who are saved, pass through, between which regeneration is the passage. The one is their first state in which they are born: a state of bondage to sin, and obnoxious to instant damnation whilst they remain in it... The other of grace and salvation, therefore oppositely to the former state.”

“God does hate His elect in some sense before their actual reconciliation. God was placable before Christ, appeased by Christ. But until there be such conditions which God hath appointed in the creature, he hath no interest in this reconciliation of God, and whatsoever person he be in whom the condition is not found, he remains under the wrath of God, and therefore in some sense under God’s hatred” (Stephen Charnock, vol. 3, p. 345). When writing on “The Satisfaction of Christ” John Owen said: “This then is what we ascribe to the death of Christ, when we say that as a sacrifice we were reconciled to God or that He made reconciliation for us. Having made God our Enemy by sin, Christ by His death turned away His anger, appeased His wrath, and brought us into favor again with God.” How far Mr. Philpot digressed from the teaching of these men we must leave his friends to judge for themselves. But we appeal now to an infinitely higher authority, namely, the Word of God.

Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that all men without exception are before actual regeneration in a like state and condition, and occupy *the same* standing or status before the Divine Law. Whatever distinguishing design God has purposed in Himself to afterward effect as a change in His own elect by the operations of His free grace, until those operations take place they are in precisely the same case as the non-elect. “We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin”—guilty, beneath sentence of condemnation. “There is none righteous, no not one”—not one who has met the requirements of the Divine Law. “That every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God”—that is, obnoxious to the Divine judgment. “There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9,10,19,22,23). The condition and position of every one relative to the Law is one and the same before his regeneration and justification, and the decree of God concerning

any difference that is yet to be made in some in nowise modifies that solemn fact. This is one chief reason why the Gospel is to be preached to every creature.

The Scriptures are equally explicit in describing the effects and consequences of lying under God's wrath. Before conversion the elect equally with the non-elect are in a state of alienation from God (Eph. 4:18), and therefore none of their services or performances can be acceptable to Him. He will receive naught at their hands: "he who turneth away his ear from hearing the Law [an in the case with every unregenerate soul], even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9). They are all under the power of the Devil (Col. 1:13), who rules at his pleasure in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). They are "without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). They are under the curse or condemning power of the Law (Gal. 3:13). They are "children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32:20) and therefore utterly unable to do a single thing which can meet with God's approval, for "without *faith* it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). They are therefore "ready to perish" (Deut. 26:5).

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). What could be plainer than that? Is not an elect soul an *unbeliever* until the moment God is pleased to give faith unto him? Assuredly: then equally sure is it that he is also under the wrath of God so long as he remains an unbeliever. Not only so, but the Word of God solemnly declares that the elect are "by nature the children of wrath even as others" (Eph. 2:3), and no Papish priest can make them otherwise by sprinkling a few drops of "holy water" upon them. But "children of wrath" they could not be had they come into this world in a justified and reconciled state. No person can be in two contrary states at the same time: obnoxious to wrath, and yet God at peace with him; under the guilt of sin, and yet justified. Wrath is upon them from the womb (because of their sinning in Adam), and that wrath remains on them so long as they continue unbelievers. Though they were (in God's purpose) in Christ from eternity, that did not prevent them being in Adam in time, and suffering the penal effects of his fall.

There is an appointed hour in their earthly history when the elect pass from under the penal wrath of God and are justified by Him and reconciled to Him. Justification is an act of God, an act *in time*, an external act. It is an act of God in a way of judicial process—His declaration as supreme Judge. It is opposed to condemnation, the granting a full discharge therefrom (Rom. 8:33-35). It is not an internal decision in God, which always remains in Him, and effects no change in the *status* of the person justified; but is a temporal act of His power which makes a relative change in the person's standing before Him. It is upon the person's believing in Christ that God justifies him and that he passes from a state of guilt and alienation to one of righteousness and reconciliation: he that believeth on Him is not condemned (that is, he is justified), but he that believes not is condemned already (John 3:18). "He that believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life [by regeneration], and shall not come into condemnation, but is *passed from* death unto life"—i.e. the life of justification (John 5:24).

If persons are justified in a proper sense by faith, then they are not justified from eternity, for we believe in time, not eternity. That we *are* justified by faith, is the doctrine of the Gospel, as is apparent from the whole current of God's Word. To cite but one verse: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ [that is, by the faith of which He is the Object], even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). That the apostle is there speaking of being justified in the sight of God, and not merely in the court of conscience, is beyond all doubt to any that will duly and fairly consider the scope of the Holy Spirit in that passage. Being justified by faith in Jesus Christ is there placed in opposition to being "justified by the works of the Law," which shows that something more fundamental than our own assurance is in view. "By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:19) makes it clear that none can obtain sentence of acquittal in the court of Divine adjudication by their own deeds. It is before God and not in the believer's consciousness that justification takes place.

"And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. 3:8). It is to be noted that there are two words here which lie directly against justification before believing: that God *would* justify the heathen—which must needs respect time to come; and "*shall* all nations be blessed" or justified—a "*shall be*" cannot be put for a thing already done. To this agrees "in the Lord *shall* all the seed of Israel be justified" (Isa. 45:25): by union with Christ through faith shall they be pronounced righteous. Again; "For as by one man's disobedience many *were* made sinners, so by the obedience of One *shall* many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Upon which the Puritan William Bridge said, "It is remarkable that when the Holy

Spirit speaks of Adam's sin condemning his posterity, He speaks of it as already past; but when He speaks of Christ's righteousness for the justification of sinners He changes to the future tense—as if He purposely designed to prevent our thoughts running after justification before believing."

What has been said above about the justification of God's elect upon their believing, holds equally good concerning His reconciliation to them when they throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him. Not only was their reconciliation decreed from everlasting but peace was actually made by Christ when He shed His blood (Col. 1:20); nevertheless, reconciliation itself is not effected until the Holy Spirit has so wrought within them as to bring about their conversion. This is conclusively established by the following passages: "For if, when we were enemies we were [judicially] reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being [actually] reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have *now* received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10,11)—that "now" would be meaningless if we were reconciled only in the eternal decree of God: what God decreed *for* us is here "received" *by* us! So again, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet NOW hath He reconciled" (Col. 1:21).

It would obviate considerable misunderstanding if it were clearly perceived that the everlasting love of God toward His elect is mainly an act of His will, the exercise of His good pleasure, the purpose of His grace, whereby He determined to do certain things for them and instate them in glory in His own good time and way. But that purpose *effects nothing* for them nor puts anything into them—for *these* there must be external acts of God's power making good His purpose. From all eternity God determined to make this earth, yet six thousand years ago it existed not! He had ordained a final Day of Judgment but it has not yet actually arrived. God has purposed that in and through Christ He will justify and save certain persons, but they are not thereby justified because God has purposed it. It is true they *will be* in due time, but not before they have been enabled to believingly appropriate the atoning work of Christ in their behalf. We must therefore draw a line between the absolute certainty of the fruition of anything God has eternally purposed, and its actual accomplishment or bringing it to pass in His appointed time.

What has been pointed out in the last paragraph should make it easier for the reader to grasp that God's eternal love unto His own (which is an imminent act of His will or good pleasure, entirely within Himself) does not exempt them from coming beneath His anger (which is not any passion in God, but the outward visitation of His displeasure) because of sin; nor does it prevent their lying beneath the dispensations of His judicial wrath, until by some interpositions of His grace in time, when He actually changes their personal state (by regeneration) and legal status (by justification), freeing them from condemnation and instating them into His favor. In other words, much may occur in the interval between God's eternal purpose and the actual working out of the same—though nothing which can in anywise jeopardise His purpose, and nothing that was not foreseen when He framed it.

But it is objected by hyper-Calvinists, If the elect were not justified in Christ from all eternity, then when God pronounces them just there is an alteration in His will and love toward them. Not so. God is no more mutable because He justifies His people in time, than He is because He regenerates them in time. God is no more chargeable with change of purpose when He produces a change in a person's standing upon his believing, than He is when He produces a change in a person's condition by the miracle of the new birth. All the change is in the creature. Though God absolutely decrees, and that from everlasting, to regenerate, to justify and to reconcile all His chosen, with the alteration of His *governmental attitude* toward them which that involves, yet this argues not the least shadow of change in God Himself when at the predestinated hour that great change is effected. Do but distinguish between the grace decreeing and the power of God executing, and all is plain. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified" (Rom. 8:30)—the calling and justifying are the *fruits* of His electing love.

But again it is objected, The elect are designated "sheep" before they believe (John 10:16), and in God's esteem they are then in a justified state. Answer: they are called "sheep" according to the immutability of the Divine decree, which cannot be frustrated, and on that account God calls "things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17), nevertheless, that verse affirms they "be not"—that is, they have no actual existence. They are "sheep" in the purpose of God, but not so as touching *the accomplishment* of the same until they be regenerated. Paul was a sheep in the decree of God even when he was wolf-like in preying upon the flock of Christ. Surely none will say he was actually a sheep whilst he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). From the decree of God we may safely

conclude the certainty of its accomplishment, but to argue that a thing is *actually* accomplished because Divinely foreordained is a most foolish and dangerous way of reasoning.

The love of God's purpose and good pleasure has not the least inconsistency with those hindrances to the peace and friendship of God which sin has interposed, for though the holiness of His Law, the righteousness of His government and the veracity of His Word, stood in the way of His taking a *sinner* into friendship and fellowship with Himself, until full satisfaction has been made to His broken Law and insulted Majesty; nevertheless His love determined and His wisdom devised a way whereby His sovereign good will should recover His people, and that, without sully the Divine character to the slightest degree, yea, in magnifying those attributes which sin had affronted. God's love has proven efficacious by the means He devised "that His banished be not expelled from Him" (2 Sam. 14:14).

From all that has been pointed out above it should be quite evident that this doctrine of reconciliation does not teach that God loved and hated His elect at the same time and in the same respect. He loved them in respect of the free purpose of His sovereign will; but His wrath was upon them in respect of His violated Law and provoked justice by their sin. But His love gave Christ to satisfy for their sins and to redeem them from the curse of the Law, and in due time He sends His Spirit to regenerate them, which lays the foundation for their conversion and restoration to Him.

The following distinctions must, then, be kept steadily in mind: 1. Between God's looking upon His elect in the purpose of His grace and as under the sentence of His Law: though the elect are born under the dispensation of His wrath, yet it is not executed upon them personally. 2. Between there being no change in God and a change in His outward dealings with us. 3. Between God's purpose concerning His elect in eternity and the accomplishment of that purpose in a time state. 4. Between God's viewing the elect in Christ their Covenant-Head and as the depraved descendants of fallen Adam: in the one cause, as "His dear children" in the other; as being "by nature the children of wrath." 5. Between God's unchanging love for us as our Father, and His official displeasure as our moral Governor and Judge. This distinction is illustrated in the case of Christ: He was the Beloved of the Father and never ceased to be so, yet Divine wrath was visited upon Him at the cross. He was dealt with not as the Son (as such) but as the Surety of His guilty people, by the Father, not as such, but as the supreme Judge. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

3b. Its Necessity

In reply to what was said in our last it may be asked, if the regeneration of Christians be complete, if their essential sanctification be effected, if they are already fitted for Heaven, then why does God still leave them here on earth? why not take them to His own immediate presence as soon as they be born again? Our first answer is, there is no "if" about it. Scripture distinctly and expressly affirms that even now believers are "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10), that He has "perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), that they are "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), and more than "complete," "perfect" and "meet" none will ever be. As to why God—generally, though not always!—leaves the babe in Christ in this world for a longer or shorter period: even if no satisfactory reason could be suggested that would not invalidate to the slightest degree what has been demonstrated, for when any truth is clearly established a hundred objections cannot set it aside. However, while we do not pretend to fathom the mind of God, the following consequences are more or less obvious.

By leaving His people here for a season, opportunity is given for: 1. God to manifest His keeping power: not only in a hostile world, but sin still indwelling believers. 2. To demonstrate the sufficiency of His grace: supporting them in their weakness. 3. To maintain a witness for Himself in a scene which lieth in the Wicked One. 4. To exhibit His faithfulness in supplying all their need in the wilderness before they reach Canaan. 5. To display His manifold wisdom unto angels: 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10. 6. To act as "salt" in preserving the race from moral suicide: by the purifying and restraining influence they exert. 7. To make evident the reality of their faith: trusting Him in sharpest trials and darkest dispensations. 8. To give them an occasion to glorify Him in the place where they dishonored Him. 9. To preach the Gospel to those of His elect yet in unbelief. 10. To afford proof they will serve Him amid the most disadvantageous circumstances. 11. To deepen their appreciation of what He has prepared for them. 12. To have fellowship with Christ, who endured the cross before He was crowned with glory and honor.

Before showing why Christian progress is necessary, let us remind the reader once more of the double signification of the term "Christian," namely, "an anointed one" and "a disciple of Christ," and how this supplies the principal key to the subject before us, intimating its *twofoldness*. His "anointing" with the Holy Spirit is an act of God, wherein he is entirely passive, but his becoming a "disciple of Christ" is a voluntary act of his own, wherein he surrenders to Christ's Lordship and resolves to be ruled by His scepter. Only as this is duly borne in mind shall we be preserved from error on either side, as we pass from one aspect of our theme to another. As the double meaning of the name "Christian" points to both the Divine operations and human activity, so in the Christian's progress we must keep before us the exercise of God's sovereignty and the discharge of our responsibility. Thus from one angle growth is neither necessary nor possible, from another it is both desirable and requisite. It is from this second angle we are now going to view the Christian, setting forth his obligations therein.

Let us illustrate what has been said above on the twofoldness of this truth by a few simple comments on a well-known verse: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). First, this implies that in our fallen condition we are wayward at heart, prone to follow a course of folly; and such is our present state by nature. Second, it implies the Lord's people have had a discovery made to them of their woeful case, and are conscious of their sinful inability to correct the same; which is the experience of all the regenerate. Third, it signifies an owning of this humiliating truth, a crying to God for enablement. They beg to be "taught," which means far more than to be shown how, namely, to be "so taught" as to be actually empowered. In other words, it is a prayer for enabling grace. Fourth, it expresses the end in view: "that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom"—perform our duty, discharge our obligations, conduct ourselves as "Wisdom's children." Grace is to be improved, turned to good account, traded with.

We all know what is meant by a person's "applying his *mind*" to his studies, namely, that he gathers in his wandering thoughts, focuses his attention on the subject before him, concentrates thereon. Equally evident is a person's "applying his *hand*" to a piece of manual labor, namely, that he get down to business, set himself to the work before him, earnestly endeavor to make a good job of it. In either case there is an im-

plication: in the former that he has been given a sound mind, in the latter that he possesses a healthy body. And in connection with both cases it is universally acknowledged that the one *ought* to so employ his mind and the other his bodily strength. Equally obvious should be the meaning of and the obligation to “apply our *hearts* unto Wisdom”: that is, diligently, fervently, earnestly make Wisdom our quest and walk in her ways. Since God has given a “new heart” at regeneration, it is to be thus employed. If He has quickened us into newness of life then we ought to grow in grace. If He has made us new creatures in Christ we are to progress as Christians.

Because this article will be read by such widely-different classes of readers and we are anxious to help all, we must consider here the objection which will be made by hyper-Calvinists, for the removal of which we quote the renowned John Owen. “It will be said that if not only the beginning of grace, sanctification, and holiness be *from God*, but the carrying of it on and the increase of it also be from Him, and not only so in general, but that all the actings of grace, and every act of it, be an immediate effect of the Holy Spirit, then what need is there that *we* should take any pains in this thing ourselves, or use our own endeavors to grow in grace and holiness as we are commanded. If God worketh all Himself in us, and without His effectual operation in us we can do nothing, there is no place left for our diligence, duty, or obedience.

“Answer. 1. This objection we must expect to meet withal at every turn. Men will not believe there is a consistency between God’s effectual grace and our diligent obedience; that is, they will not *believe* what is plainly, clearly, distinctly, revealed in the Scripture, and which is suited unto the experience of all that truly believe, because they cannot, it may be, comprehend it within the compass of carnal reason. 2. Let the apostle answer this objection for this once: ‘His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust’ (2 Peter 1:3,4). If all things that pertain unto life and godliness, among which doubtless is the preservation and increase of grace, be given unto us by the power of God; if from Him we receive that Divine nature, by virtue whereof our corruptions are subdued, then I pray what need is there of any endeavors of our own? The whole work of sanctification is wrought in us, it seems and that by the power of God: we therefore, may let it alone and leave it unto Him whose it is, whilst we are negligent, secure and at ease. Nay says the apostle, this is not *the use* which the grace of God is to be put unto. The consideration of it is, or ought to be, the principal motive and encouragement unto all diligence for the increase of holiness in us. For so he adds immediately: ‘But also for this cause’ [Greek] or because of the gracious operations of the Divine power in us; ‘giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,’ etc. (v. 5).

“These objectors and this apostle were very diversely minded in these matters: what they make an insuperable discouragement unto diligence in obedience, that he makes the greatest motive and encouragement thereunto. 3. I say, from this consideration it will unavoidably follow, that we ought continually to wait and depend on God for supplies of His Spirit and grace without which we can do nothing: that God is more the Author by His grace of the good we do than we are ourselves (not I, but the grace of God that was with me): that we ought to be careful that by our negligences and sins we provoke not the Holy Spirit to withhold His aids and assistances, and so to leave us to ourselves, in which condition we can do nothing that is spiritually good: these things, I say, will unavoidably follow on the doctrine before declared; and if any one be offended at them it is not in our power to render them relief.”

Coming now more directly to the *needs-be* for spiritual growth or Christian progress. This is not optional but obligatory, for we are expressly bidden to “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)—grow from infancy to the vigor of youth, and from the zeal of youth to the wisdom of maturity. And again, to be “building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20). It is not sufficient to be grounded and established in the faith, for we must grow more and more therein. At conversion we take upon us the yoke of Christ, and then His word is “learn of Me,” which is to be a life-long experience. In becoming Christ’s disciples we do but enter His school: not remain in the kindergarten but to progress under His tuition. “A wise man will hear and increase learning” (Prov. 1:5), and seek to make good use of that learning. The believer has not yet reached Heaven: he is on the way, journeying thither, fleeing from the city of destruction. That is why the Christian life is so often likened unto a *race*, and the believer unto a runner: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize” (Phil. 3:13,14).

1. Only thus is the Triune God glorified. This is so obvious that it really needs no arguing. It brings no glory to God that His children should be dwarfs. As sunshine and rain are sent for the nourishment and fructification of vegetation, so the means of grace are provided that we may increase in our spiritual stature. "As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2)—not only in the intellectual knowledge of it, but in a practical conformity thereunto. This should be our chief concern and be made our principal business: to become better acquainted with God, to have the heart more occupied with and affected by His perfections, to seek after a fuller knowledge of His will, to regulate our conduct thereby, and thus "show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The more we evidence our sonship, the more we conduct ourselves as becometh the children of God before a perverse generation, the more do we honor Him who has set His love upon us.

That our spiritual growth and progress *is* glorifying unto God appears plainly from the prayers of the apostles, for none were more concerned about His glory than they were, and nothing occupied so prominent a place in their intercession as this. As we hope to allude to this again in later articles, one or two quotations must here suffice. For the Ephesians Paul prayed, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:19). For the Philippians "that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment...being filled with the fruits of righteousness" (1:9-11). For the Colossians, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:10,11). From which we learn that it is our privilege and duty to obtain more spiritual views of the Divine perfections, begetting in us an increasing holy delight in Him, making our walk more acceptable. There should be a growing acquaintance with the excellency of Christ, advancing in our love of Him, and the more lively exercises of our graces.

2. Only thus do we give proof of our regeneration. "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: *so* shall ye be My disciples" (John 15:8). That does not mean we become the disciples of Christ as a result of our fruitfulness, but that we make manifest we *are* His by our fruitbearing. They who bear no fruit have no vital union with Christ, and like the barren fig tree, are under His curse. Very solemn is this, and by such a criterion each of us should measure himself. That which is brought forth by the Christian is not to be restricted unto what, in many circles, is called "service" or "personal work," but has reference to that which issues from the exercise of all the spiritual graces. Thus: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44,45), that is, that you may *make it evident* to yourself and fellows that you have been made partaker of the Divine nature.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these etc. ...But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:19,22,23). The reference is not directly to what the Holy Spirit produces, but rather to that which is borne of the "spirit" or new nature of which He is the Author (John 15:16). This is evident from its being set over against the "works of the flesh" or old nature. It is by means of this "fruit," these lovely graces, that the regenerate make manifest the presence of a super-natural principle within them. The more such "fruit" abounds, the clearer our evidence that we have been born again. The total absence of such fruit would prove our profession to be an empty one. It has often been pointed out by others that what issues from the flesh are designated "works," for a machine can produce such; but that which the "spirit" yields is *living* "fruit" in contrast from "dead works" (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus, fruit-bearing is necessary in order to evidence the new birth.

3. Only thus do we certify that we have been made partakers of an effectual call and are among the chosen of God. "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10) is the Divine exhortation—one which has puzzled many. Yet it should not: it is not to secure it Godward (which is impossible), but make it more certain to yourselves and your brethren. And how is this to be accomplished? Why, by acquiring clearer and fuller evidence of the same: by spiritual growth, for growth is the proof that life is present. This interpretation is definitely established by the context. After enumerating the bestowments of Divine grace (vv. 3,4), the apostle says, now here is your responsibility: "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith [by bringing it into exercise] virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love" (vv. 5-7). Faith itself is ever to be operative, but according to different occasions and in their seasons let each of your graces be exercised, and in proportion as they are, the life of holiness is furthered in the soul and there is a proportionate spiritual growth—cf. Colossians 3:12, 13.

4. Only thus do we adorn the doctrine we profess (Titus 2:10). The Truth we claim to have received into our hearts is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3), and therefore the more our daily lives be conformed thereto, the clearer proof do we give that our character and conduct is regulated by *Heavenly* principles. It is by our fruits we are known (Matt. 7:16), for "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." Thus, it is only by our being "fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10) that we make it manifest that we are the "trees of the Lord" (Ps. 104:16). "Now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). It is not the character of our walk which qualifies us to become the children of light, but which demonstrates that we are such. Because we are the children of Him who is light (1 John 1:5) we must shun the darkness. If we have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2) then only that should proceed from us which "becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). The more we progress in godliness, the more we adorn our profession.

5. Only thus do we experience more genuine assurance. Peace becomes more stable and joy abounds in proportion as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and become more conformed practically to His holy image. It is because so many become slack in using the means of grace and are so little exercised about growing up into Christ "in all things" (Eph. 4:15) that doubts and fears possess their hearts. If they do not "give all diligence to add to their faith" (2 Peter 1:5) by cultivating their several graces, they must not be surprised if they are far from being "sure" of their Divine calling and election. It is "the diligent soul" and not the dilatory, who "shall be made fat" (Prov. 13:4). It is the one who makes conscience of obedience and keeps Christ's commandments who is favored with love-tokens from Him (John 14:21). There is an inseparable connection between our being "led [forward] by the Spirit of God"—which intimates our voluntary occurrence—and His "bearing witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:14,16).

6. Only thus are we preserved from grievous backsliding. In view of much that has been said above this should be quite obvious. The very term "backsliding" denotes failure to make progress and go forward. Peter's denial of Christ in the high priest's palace was preceded by his following Him "afar off" (Matt. 26:58), and that has been recorded for our learning and warning. The same principle is illustrated again in connection with the awful fall of David. Though it was "at the time when kings go forth to battle," he was selfishly and lazily taking his ease, and while so lax succumbed to temptation (2 Sam. 11:1,2). Unless we "follow on to know the Lord" and learn to make use of the armor which He has provided, we shall easily be overcome by the Enemy. Only as our hearts are kept healthy and our affection set upon things above shall we be impervious to the attractions of this world. We cannot be stationary: if we do not grow, we shall decline.

7. Only thus shall we preserve the Cause of Christ from reproach. The backsliding of His people makes His enemies to blaspheme—how many have taken occasion to do so from the sad case of David! When the world sees us halting, it is gratified, being bolstered up in their idea that godliness is but a pose, a sham. Because of this, among other reasons, Christians are bidden to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). If we go backward instead of forward—and we *must* do one or the other—then we greatly dishonor the name of Christ and fill His foes with unholy glee. Rather is it "the will of God that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). The longer they remain in this world, the more apparent should be the contrast between the children of light and those who are the subjects of the Prince of darkness. Very necessary then, from many considerations, is our growth in grace.
—AWP

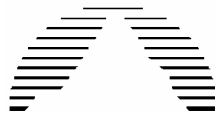
CONTENTS

Ignorance and Knowledge	2
The Prayers of the Apostles	5
<i>4. Romans 15:5-7</i>	
The Mission and Miracles of Elisha	9
<i>16. Tenth Miracle - part 3</i>	
The Doctrine of Reconciliation	13
<i>2. Its Distinctions</i>	
Spiritual Growth or Christian Progress.....	17
<i>3b. Its Necessity</i>	

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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

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