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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Introduction

During the last three years, these cover-page articles have been devoted to a consideration of the attributes of God our Father, and then to a contemplation of some of the glories of God our Redeemer. It seems fitting then that these should now be followed by a series upon God the Holy Spirit. The need for this is real and pressing, for ignorance concerning the third Person of the Godhead is most dishonoring to Him and highly injurious to ourselves. The late George Smeaton (1814-1889) of Scotland began his excellent work upon the Holy Spirit by saying, “Wherever Christianity has been a living power, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has uniformly been regarded equally with the atonement and justification by faith as the article of a standing or falling church. The distinctive feature of Christianity, as it addresses itself to man’s experience, is the work of the Spirit, which not only elevates it far above all philosophical speculation, but also above every other form of religion.”

Not at all too strong was the language of Samuel Chadwick when he said, “The gift of the Spirit is the crowning mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It was for this all the rest was. The incarnation and crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension were all preparatory to Pentecost. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, all the rest would be useless. The great thing in Christianity is the gift of the Spirit. The essential, vital, central element in the life of the soul and the work of the church is the Person of the Spirit” (*Joyful News*, 1911).

The great importance of a reverent and prayerful study of this subject should be apparent to every real child of God. The repeated references made to the Spirit by Christ in His final discourse (John 14 to 16) at once intimates this. The particular work which has been committed to Him furnishes clear proof of it. There is no spiritual good communicated to anyone but by the Spirit. Whatever God in His grace works in us, it is by

the Spirit. The only sin for which there is no forgiveness is one committed against the Spirit—how necessary is it then that we should be well-instructed in the Scripture doctrine concerning Him! The great abuse there has been in all ages under the pretense of His holy name should prompt unto diligent study. Finally, the awful ignorance which now so widely prevails upon the Spirit's office and operations urges us to put forth our best efforts.

Yet important as is our subject and prominent as is the place given to it in Holy Writ, it seems that it has always met with a considerable amount of neglect and pervasion. Thomas Goodwin commenced his massive work on "The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation" (1660) by affirming, "There is a general omission in the saints of God, in their not giving the Holy Spirit that glory that is due to His person and for His great work of salvation in us, insomuch that we have in our hearts almost forgotten this Third Person." If that could be said in the midst of the palmy days of the Puritans, what language would be required to set forth the awful spiritual ignorance and impotency of this benighted twentieth century!

In the Preface to his lectures on "The Person, Godhead, and Ministry of the Holy Spirit" (1817), Robert Hawker wrote, "I am the more prompted to this service from contemplating the present awful day of the world. Surely the 'last days' and the 'perilous times,' so expressly spoken of by the Spirit, are come (1Ti 4:1). The flood gates of heresy are broken up and are pouring forth their deadly poison in various streams through the land. In a more daring and open manner, the denial of the Person, Godhead, and ministry of the Holy Spirit is come forward and indicates the tempest to follow. In such a season it is needful to contend, and that earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Now in a more awakened manner ought the people of God to remember the words of Jesus, and 'to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.'"

So again, in 1880, George Smeaton wrote, "We may safely affirm that the doctrine of the Spirit is almost entirely ignored." And let us add, wherever little honor is done to the Spirit, there is grave cause to suspect the genuineness of any profession of Christianity. Against this it may be replied, such charges as the above no longer hold good. Would to God they did not, but they do. While it be true that during the past two generations much has been written and spoken on the person of the Spirit, yet, for the most part, it has been of a sadly inadequate and erroneous character. Much dross has been mingled with the gold. A fearful amount of unscriptural nonsense and fanaticism has marred the testimony. Furthermore, it cannot be gainsaid that it is no longer generally recognized that supernatural agency is imperatively required in order for the redemptive work of Christ to be *applied* to sinners. Rather do *actions* show it is now widely held that if unregenerate souls are instructed in the letter of Scripture their own will-power is sufficient to enable them to "decide for Christ."

In the great majority of cases, professing Christians are too puffed up by a sense of what they suppose *they* are doing *for* God, to earnestly study what God has promised to do for and in His people. They are so occupied with their fleshly efforts to "win souls for Christ" that they feel not their own deep need of the Spirit's anointing. The leaders of "Christian" (?) enterprise are so concerned in multiplying "Christian workers" that quantity and not quality is the main consideration. How few today recognize that if the number of "missionaries" on the foreign field were increased twenty fold the next year, that that, of itself, *would not ensure* the genuine salvation of one additional heathen? Even though

every new missionary *were* “sound in the faith” and preached only “the truth,” that would not add one iota of spiritual power to the missionary forces, without the Holy Spirit’s unction and blessing! The same principle holds good everywhere. If the orthodox seminaries and the much advertised Bible institutes turned out one hundred times more men than they are now doing, the churches would not be one whit better off than they are, unless God vouchsafed a fresh outpouring of His Spirit. In like manner, no Sunday school is strengthened by the mere multiplication of its teachers.

O my readers, face the solemn fact that the greatest lack of all in Christendom today is *the absence* of the Holy Spirit’s power and blessing. Review the activities of the past thirty years. Millions of dollars have been freely devoted to the support of professed Christian enterprises. Bible institutes and schools have turned out “trained workers” by the thousands. Bible conferences have sprung up on every side like mushrooms. Countless booklets and tracts have been printed and circulated. Time and labor have been given by an almost incalculable number of “personal workers.” And *with what results*? Has the standard of personal piety advanced? Are the churches less worldly? Are their members more Christ-like in their daily walk? Is there more godliness in the home? Are the children more obedient and respectful? Is the Sabbath-day being increasingly sanctified and kept holy? Has the standard of honesty in business been raised?

Those blest with any spiritual discernment can return but one answer to the above questions. In spite of all the huge sums of money that have been spent, in spite of all the labor which has been put forth, in spite of all the new workers that have been added to the old ones, the spirituality of Christendom is at a far lower ebb today than it was thirty years ago. Numbers of professing Christians have increased, fleshly activities have multiplied, but spiritual power has waned. Why? *Because there is a grieved and quenched Spirit in our midst.* While HIS blessing is withheld, there can be no improvement. What is needed today is for the saints to get down on their faces before God, cry unto Him in the name of Christ to so work again, that what has grieved His Spirit may be put away and the channel of blessing once more be opened.

Until the Holy Spirit is again given His rightful place in our hearts, thoughts, and activities, there can be no improvement. Until it be recognized that we are entirely dependent upon *His* operations for all spiritual blessing, the root of the trouble cannot be reached. Until it be recognized that it is, “Not by might, [of trained workers] nor by power [of intellectual argument or persuasive appeal], but by *MY SPIRIT*, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Zec 4:6), there will be no deliverance from that fleshly zeal which is not according to knowledge and which is now paralyzing Christendom. Until the Holy Spirit is honored, sought unto, and counted upon, the present spiritual drought must continue. May it please our gracious God to give the writer those messages and prepare the hearts of our readers to receive that which will be unto His glory, the furtherance of His cause upon earth, and the good of His dear people. Brethren, pray for us.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

61. The Life of Abraham (11:9-10)

In the preceding article, we considered the appearing of the Lord unto idolatrous Abraham in Chaldea, the call which he then received to make a complete break from his old life, and to go forward in faith in complete subjection to the revealed will of God. This we contemplated as a figure and type, an illustration and example of one essential feature of regeneration, namely, God's effectually calling His elect from death unto life, out of darkness into his marvelous light, with the blessed fruits this produces. As we saw on the last occasion, a mighty change was wrought in Abraham, so that his manner of life was completely altered, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Ere turning unto the verses which are to form our present portion, let us first ask and seek to answer the following question, Was Abraham's response to God's call a perfect one? Was his obedience flawless? Ah, dear reader, is it difficult to anticipate the answer? There has been only one perfect life lived on this earth. Moreover, had there been no failure in Abraham's walk, would not the type have been faulty? But God's types are accurate at every point and in His Word the Spirit has portrayed the characters of His people in the colours of truth and reality. He has faithfully described them as they actually were. True, a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham, but the "flesh" had not been removed from him. True, a supernatural faith had been communicated to him, but the root of unbelief had not been taken out of him. Two contrary principles were at work within Abraham (as they are in us) and *both* of these were evidenced.

God's requirements from Abraham were clearly made known, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen 12:1). The first response which he made to this is recorded in Genesis 11:31, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." He left Chaldea, but instead of separating from his "kindred," he suffered his nephew Lot to accompany him, instead of forsaking his father's house, Terah was permitted to take the lead, and instead of entering Canaan, Abraham stopped short and settled in Haran. Abraham temporized—his obedience was partial, faltering, tardy. He yielded to the affections of the flesh. Alas, cannot both writer and reader see here a plain reflection of himself, a portrayal of his own sad failures! Yes, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Pro 27:19).

But let us earnestly seek grace at this point to be much upon our guard lest we "wrest" (2Pe 3:16) to our own hurt what has just been before us. If the thought arises, "O well, Abraham was not perfect, *he* did not always do as God commanded him, so it cannot be expected that *I* should do any better than he did," then recognize that this is a temptation from the devil. Abraham's failures are not recorded for us to shelter behind, for us to make them so many palliations for our own sinful falls. No, rather are they to be regarded as so

many warnings for us to take to heart and prayerfully heed. Such warnings only leave us the more without excuse. And when we discover that we have sadly repeated the backslidings of the Old Testament saints, that very discovery would but humble us the more before God, move to a deeper repentance, lead to increasing self-distrust, and issue in a more earnest and constant seeking of divine grace to uphold and maintain us in the paths of righteousness.

Though Abraham failed, there was no failure in God. Blessed indeed is it to behold His long-suffering, His super-abounding grace, His unchanging faithfulness, and the eventual fulfilling of His own purpose. This reveals to us, for the joy of our hearts and the worshipping praise of our souls, another reason why the Holy Spirit has so faithfully placed on record the shadows as well as the lights in the lives of the OLD TESTAMENT saints—they are to serve not only as solemn warnings for us to heed, but also as so many examples of that marvelous patience of God that bears so long and so tenderly with the dullness and waywardness of His children, examples too of that infinite mercy which deals with His people not after their sins, nor rewards them according to their iniquities. O how the realization of this should melt our hearts and evoke true worship and thanksgiving unto “the God of *all* grace” (1Pe 5:10). It will be so, it must be so, in every truly regenerate soul. Though the unregenerate will only turn the very grace of God “into lasciviousness” (Jude 1:4) unto their eternal undoing.

The sequel to Genesis 11:31 is found in 12:5, “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.” Though Abraham had settled down in Haran, God would not allow him to continue there indefinitely. The Lord had purposed that he should enter Canaan and no purpose of His can fail. God therefore tumbled him out of the nest which he had made for himself (Deu 32:11-12) and very solemn is it to observe the means which he used, “And Terah died in Haran” (Gen 11:32 and cf. Act 7:4)—death had to come in before Abraham left Halfway House! He never started across the wilderness until death severed that tie of the flesh which had held him back. But that with which we desire to be specially occupied at this point is the wondrous love of God toward His erring child.

“I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). Blessed, thrice blessed, is this. Though the dogs are likely to consume it unto their own ruin, yet that must not make us withhold this sweet portion of “the children’s bread.” The immutability of the divine nature is the saints’ indemnity. God’s unchangeableness affords the fullest assurance of His faithfulness in the promises. No change in us can alter His mind, no unfaithfulness on our part will cause Him to revoke His word. Unstable though we be, sorely tempted as we often are, tripped up as may frequently be our case, yet God “*shall* also confirm you unto the end...God is faithful” (1Co 1:8-9). The powers of Satan and the world are against us, suffering and death before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us, yet God *will* “confirm us to the end.” He did Abraham. He will us. Hallelujah!

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9). This verse brings before us the second effect or proof of Abraham’s faith. In the previous verse, the apostle had spoken of the place from whence Abraham was called, here of the place to

which he was called. There he had shown the power of faith in self-denial in obedience to God's command, here we behold the patience and constancy of faith in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. But the mere reading of this verse by itself is not likely to make much impression upon us. We need to diligently consult and carefully ponder other passages in order to be in a position to appreciate its real force.

First of all we are told, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen 12:6). Unless a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham's heart, subduing (though not eradicating) his natural desires and reasonings, he certainly would not have remained in Canaan. An idolatrous people were already occupying the land. Again, we are told that "He [God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much to set his foot on" (Act 7:5). Only the unclaimed tracts, which were commonly utilized by those having flocks and herds, were available for his use. Not an acre did he own, for he had to "purchase" a plot of ground as a burying place for his dead (Gen 23). What a trial of faith was this, for Hebrews 11:8 expressly declares that he was afterward to "receive" that land "for an inheritance." Yet instead of this presenting a difficulty, it only enhances the beauty and accuracy of the type.

The Christian has also been begotten "to an inheritance" (1Pe 1:4), but he does not fully enter into it the moment he is called from death unto life. No, instead, he is left here (very often) for many years to fight his way through an hostile world and against an opposing devil. During that fight he meets with many discouragements and receives numerous wounds. Hard duties have to be performed, difficulties overcome, and trials endured, before the Christian enters fully into that inheritance unto which divine grace has appointed him. And naught but a divinely bestowed and divinely maintained faith is sufficient for these things—that alone will sustain the heart in the face of losses, reproaches, painful delays. It was thus with Abraham. It was by faith he left the land of his birth, started out on a journey he knew not whither, crossed a dreary wilderness, and then sojourned in tents for more than half a century in a strange land.

Rightly did the Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677) say, "From God's training up Abraham in a course of difficulties, we see it is no easy matter to go to heaven. There is a great deal of ado to unsettle a believer from the world and there is a great deal of ado to fix the heart in the expectation of heaven. First there must be self-denial in coming out of the world and divorcing ourselves from our bosom sins and dearest interests, and then there must be patience shown in waiting for God's mercy to eternal life, waiting His leisure as well as performing His will. Here is the time of our exercise, and we must expect it, since the father of the faithful was thus trained up ere he could inherit the promises."

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country" (Heb 11:9). The force of this will be more apparent if we link together two statements in Genesis, "And the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen 12:6), "And the LORD said unto Abram...all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever" (Gen 13:14-15). Here was the ground which Abraham's faith rested upon, the plain word of Him that cannot lie. Upon that promise his heart reposed and therefore he was occupied not with the Canaanites, who were then in the land, but with the invisible Jehovah who had pledged it unto him. How different was the case of the spies, who, in a later day, went up into this

very land, with the assurance of the Lord that it was a "good land." Their report was "the land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we *saw* in it are men of a great stature. And there we *saw* the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num 13:32-33).

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country" (Heb 11:9). As it was by faith that Abraham went out of Chaldea, so it was by faith he remained, out of the country of which he was originally a native. This illustrates the fact that not only do we become Christians by an act of faith (the yielding up of the whole man unto God), but that as Christians we are called upon to *live* by faith (Gal 2:20), to walk by faith and not by sight (2Co 5:7). The place where Abraham now abode is here styled "the land of promise," rather than Canaan, to teach us that it is God's promise which puts vigour into faith. Note how both Moses and Joshua, at a later day, sought to quicken the faith of the Israelites by this means, "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers *hath promised thee*" (Deu 6:3). "And the LORD your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God *hath promised* unto you" (Jos 23:5).

"As in a strange country" (Heb 11:9). This tells us how Abraham regarded that land which was then occupied by the Canaanites and how he conducted himself in it. He purchased no farm, built no house, and entered into no alliance with its people. True, he entered into a league of peace and amity with Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre (Gen 14:13), but it was as a stranger and not as one who had any thing of his own in the land. He reckoned that country no more his own than any other land in the world. He took no part in its politics, had nothing to do with its religion, had very little social intercourse with its people, but lived by faith and found his joy and satisfaction in communion with the Lord. This teaches us that though the Christian is still in the world, he is not of it, nor must he cultivate its friendship (Jam 4:4). He may use it as necessity requires, but he must ever be on his prayerful guard against abusing it (1Co 7:31).

"Dwelling in tabernacles." These words inform us both of Abraham's manner of life and disposition of heart during his sojourning in Canaan. Let us consider them from this twofold viewpoint. Abraham did not conduct himself as the possessor of Canaan, but as a foreigner and pilgrim in it. To Heth he confessed, "I am a stranger and sojourner with you" (Gen 23:4). As the father of the faithful, he set an example of self-denial and patience. It was not that he was unable to purchase an estate, build an elaborate mansion, and settle down in some attractive spot, for Genesis 13:2 tells us that "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold," but God had not called him unto this. Ah, my reader, a palace without the enjoyed presence of the Lord, is but an empty bauble, whereas a prison-dungeon occupied by one in real communion with Him, may be the very vestibule of heaven.

Living in a strange country, surrounded by wicked heathen, had it not been wiser for Abraham to erect a strongly fortified castle? A "tent" offers little or no defense against attack. Ah, but "the angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Psa 34:7). And Abraham both feared and trusted God. "Where faith

enables men to live unto God, as unto their eternal concerns, it will enable them to trust unto Him in all the difficulties, dangers, and hazards of this life. To pretend a trust in God as unto our souls and invisible things, and not resign our temporal concerns with patience and quietness unto His disposal, is a vain pretense. And we may take hence an eminent trial of our faith. Too many deceive themselves with a presumption of faith in the promises of God, as unto things future and eternal. They suppose that they do so believe, as that they shall be eternally saved, but if they are brought into any trial, as unto things temporal, wherein they are concerned, they know not what belongs unto the life of faith, nor how to trust God in a due manner. It was not so with Abraham. His faith acted itself uniformly with respect to the providences, as well as the promises of God" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Abram's "dwelling in tents" also denoted the disposition of his heart. A life of faith is one which has respect unto things spiritual and eternal and therefore one of its fruits is to be contented with a very small portion of earthly things. Faith not only begets a confidence and joy in the things promised, but it also works a composure of spirit and submission to the Lord's will. A little would serve Abraham on earth because he expected so much in heaven. Nothing is more calculated to deliver the heart from covetousness, from lusting after the perishing things of time and sense, from envying the poor rich, than to heed that exhortation, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:2). But it is one thing to quote that verse and another to put it into practice. If we are the children of Abraham, we must emulate the example of Abraham. Are *our* carnal affections mortified? Can we submit to a pilgrim's fare without murmuring? Are we enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2Ti 2:3)?

The tent-life of the patriarchs demonstrated their pilgrim character. It made manifest their contentment to live upon the *surface* of the earth, for a tent has no foundation, and can be pitched or struck at short notice. They were sojourners here and just passing through this wilderness scene without striking their roots into it. Their tent life spoke of their separation from the world's allurements, politics, friendships, religion. It is deeply significant to note that when reference is made to Abraham's "tent," there is mention also of his "altar"—"and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD" (Gen 12:8)—"and he went on his journeys...unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning...unto the place of the altar" (Gen 13:3-4)—"Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD" (Gen 13:18). Observe carefully the *order* in each of these passages. There must be heart *separation* from the world before a thrice holy God can be *worshipped* in spirit and in truth.

"Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb 11:9). The Greek here is more expressive than our translation, "in tents dwelling." The Holy Spirit emphasized first not the act of dwelling, but the fact that this dwelling was in *tents*. The mention of Isaac and Jacob in this verse is for the purpose of calling our attention unto the further fact that Abraham continued thus for the space of almost a century, Jacob not being born until he had sojourned in Canaan for eighty-five years! Herein we are taught that "when we are once engaged and have given up ourselves to God in a way of believing, there must be no choice, no dividing or halting, no halving, but we

must follow Him fully, wholly, living by faith in all things” (John Owen), and that unto the very end of our earthly course.

There does not seem to be anything requiring us to believe that Isaac and Jacob shared Abraham’s tent, rather is the thought that they also lived the same pilgrim’s life in Canaan. As Abraham was a sojourner in that land, without any possession there, so were they. The “with” may be extended to cover all that is said in the previous part of the verse, indicating it was “by faith” that both Abraham’s son and grandson followed the example set them. The words which follow confirm this—they were “the heirs with him of the same promise.” That is indeed a striking expression, for ordinarily sons are merely “heirs” and not joint-heirs with their parents. This is to show us that Isaac was not indebted to Abraham for the promise, nor Jacob to Isaac, each receiving the same promise direct from God. This is clear from a comparison of Genesis 13:15 and 17:8 with 26:3 and 28:13, 35:12. It also tells us that if we are to have an interest in the blessings of Abraham, we must walk in the steps of his faith.

Very blessed and yet very searching is the principle exemplified in the last clause of Hebrews 11:9. God’s saints are all of the same spiritual disposition. They are members of the same family, united to the same Christ, indwelt by the same Spirit. “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul” (Act 4:32). They are governed by the same laws, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). They all have one aim, to please God and glorify Him on earth. They are called to the same privileges, “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us,” etc. (2Pe 1:1).

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Ah, here is the explanation of what has been before us in the previous verse, as the opening “for” intimates. Abraham was walking by faith and not by sight and therefore his heart was set upon things above and not upon things below. It is the exercise of faith and hope unto heavenly objects which makes us carry ourselves with a loose heart toward worldly comforts. Abraham realized that his portion and possession was not on earth, but in heaven. It was this which made him content to dwell in tents. He did not build a city, as Cain did (Gen 4:17), but “looked for” one of which God himself is the maker. What an illustration and exemplification was this of the opening verse of our chapter, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

That for which Abraham looked was heaven itself, here likened unto a city with foundations, in manifest antithesis from the “tents” which have no foundations. Various figures are used to express the saints’ everlasting portion. It is called an “inheritance” (1Pe 1:4), to signify the freeness of its tenure. It is denominated “many mansions” in the Father’s house. It is styled an “heavenly country” (Heb 11:16) to signify its spaciousness. There are various resemblances between heaven and a “city.” A city is a civil society that is under government. So in heaven there is a society of angels and saints ruled by God (Heb 12:22-24). In Bible days, a city was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls. So in heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well stocked with provisions. So in heaven nothing will be lacking which is good and blessed. The “foundations” of the heavenly city are the eternal decree and love

of God, the unalterable covenant of grace, Christ Jesus the Rock of Ages, on which it stands firm and immovable.

It is the power of a faith which is active and operative that will sustain the heart under hardships and sufferings as nothing else will. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2Co 4:16-18). As John Owen well said, "This is a full description of Abraham's faith, in the operation and effect here ascribed to it by the apostle. And herein it is exemplary and encouraging to all believers under their present trials and sufferings."

Ah, my brethren and sisters, do we not see from that which has been before us *why* the attractions of the world or the depressing effects of suffering have such a power upon us? Is it not because we are negligent in the stirring up of our faith to "lay hold of the hope which is set before us"? If we meditated more frequently upon the glory and bliss of heaven, and were favored with foretastes of it in our souls, would we not sigh after it more ardently and press forward unto it more earnestly? "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (Joh 8:56), and if we had more serious and spiritual thoughts of the day to come, we would not be so sad as we often are. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:3), for it lifts the heart above this scene and carries us in spirit within the veil. The more our hearts are attracted to heaven, the less will the poor things of this world appeal to us.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

13. His Sojourn at Ziph

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psa 34:19)—some internal, others external, some from friends, others from foes, some more directly at the hand of God, others more remotely by the instrumentality of the devil. Nor should this be thought strange. Such has been the lot of all God's children in greater or less degree. Nor ought we to expect much comfort in a world which so basely crucified the Lord of Glory. The sooner the Christian makes it his daily study to pass through this world as a stranger and pilgrim, anxious to depart and be with Christ, the better for his peace of mind. But it is natural to cling tenaciously to this life and to love the things of time and sense, and therefore most of the Lord's people have to encounter many buffetings and have many disappointments before they are brought to hold temporal things with a light hand and before their silly hearts are weaned from that which satisfies not.

There is scarcely any affliction which besets the suffering people of God that the subject of these articles did not experience. David, in the different periods of his varied life, was placed in almost every situation in which a believer, be he rich or poor in this

world's goods, can be placed. This is one feature which makes the study of his life of such practical interest unto us today. And this also it was which experimentally fitted him to write so many psalms, which the saints of all ages have found so perfectly suited to express unto God the varied feelings of their souls. No matter whether the heart be cast down by the bitterest grief, or whether it be exultant with overflowing joy, nowhere can we find language more appropriate to use in our approaches unto the Majesty on High than in the recorded sobs and songs of him who tasted the bitters of cruel treatment and base betrayals, and the sweetness of human success and spiritual communion with the Lord, as few have done.

Oftentimes the providences of God seem profoundly mysterious to our dull perceptions and strange unto us do appear the schoolings through which He passes His servants. Nevertheless, faith is assured that omniscience makes no mistakes and He who is love causes none of His children a needless tear. Beautifully did C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) introduce his exposition of Psalm 59 by saying, "Strange that the painful events in David's life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy. Out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey-bearing flowers of psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God in after ages would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the harps of sanctified songsters." Let every troubled reader seek to lay this truth to heart and take courage.

"And David abode in the wilderness in strongholds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand" (1Sa 23:14). It is blessed to behold David's self-restraint under sore provocation. Though perfectly innocent, so far as his conduct toward Saul was concerned, that wicked king continued to hound him without any rest. David had conducted himself honorably in every public station he filled and now he has to suffer disgrace in the eyes of the people as a hunted outlaw. Great must have been the temptation to put an end to Saul's persecution by the use of force. He was a skilled leader, had six hundred men under him (1Sa 23:13), and he might easily have employed strategy, lured his enemy into a trap, fallen upon and slain him. Instead, he possessed his soul in patience, walked in God's ways, and waited God's time. And the Lord honored this as the sequel shows.

Ah, dear reader, it is written, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Pro 16:32). O for more godly self-control—for this we should pray earnestly and oft. Are you, like David was, sorely oppressed? Are you receiving evil at the hands of those from whom you might well expect good? Is there some Saul mercilessly persecuting you? Then no doubt you too are tempted to take things into your own hands, perhaps have recourse to the law of the land. But O tried one, suffer us to gently remind you that it is written, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath...vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (Rom 12:19-20). Remember too the example left us by the Lord Jesus, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1Pe 2:23).

"And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood" (1Sa 23:15). How this illustrates what we are told in

Galatians 4:29, "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now"! And let us not miss the deeper spiritual meaning of this—the opposition which Isaac encountered from Ishmael adumbrated the lustings of the "flesh" against "the spirit." There is a continual warfare within every real Christian between the principle of sin and the principle of grace, commonly termed "the two natures." There is a spiritual Saul who is constantly seeking the life of a spiritual David. It is the "old man" with his affections and appetites, seeking to slay the new man. Against his relentless attacks, we need ever to be on our guard.

"And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood" (1Sa 23:15). "Ziph" derived its name from a city in the tribe of Judah (Jos 15:24). It is surely significant that "Ziph" signifies "a refining place." Possibly the "mountain" there (1Sa 23:14) was rich in minerals and at Ziph there was a smelter and refiner. Be this as it may, the spiritual lesson is here writ too plain for us to miss. The hard knocks which the saint receives from a hostile world, the persecutions he endures at the hands of those who hate God, the trials through which he passes in this scene of sin, may, and should be, improved to the good of his soul. O may many of the Lord's people prove that these "hard times" through which they are passing are a "refining place" for their faith and other spiritual graces.

"And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, 'Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house" (1Sa 23:16-18). These verses record the final meeting on earth between David and the weak, vacillating Jonathan. Attached to David as he was by a strong natural affection, yet he lacked grace to throw in his lot with the hunted fugitive. Refusing to join with his father in persecuting David, yet the pull of the palace and the court was too strong to be resisted. He stands as a solemn example of the spiritual compromiser, of the man who is naturally attracted to Christ, but lacking a supernatural knowledge of Him which leads to full surrender to Him. That he "strengthened David's hand in God" no more evidenced him to be a regenerate man, than do the words of Saul in verse 21. Instead of his words in 1 Samuel 23:17 coming true, he fell by the sword of the Philistines on Gilboa.

"Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeath, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand" (1Sa 23:19-20). Alas, what is man and how little to be depended upon! Here was David seeking shelter from his murderous foe, and that among the people of his own tribe, and there were they, in order to curry favor with Saul, anxious to betray him into his hands. It was a gross breach of hospitality, and there was no excuse for it, for Saul had not sought unto nor threatened them. It mattered not to them though innocent blood were shed, so long as they procured the smile of the apostate monarch. That day alone will show how many have fallen victims before those who cared for nothing better than the favor of those in authority.

“And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me” (1Sa 23:21). Thankfully did Saul receive the offer of these treacherous miscreants. Observe well how he used the language of piety while bent on committing the foulest crime! Oh my reader, for your own good we beg you to take heed unto this. Require something more than fair words, or even religious phrases, before you form a judgment of another, and still more so before you place yourself in his power. Promises are easily made and easily broken by most people. The name of God is glibly taken upon the lips of multitudes who have no fear of God in their hearts. Note too how the wretched Saul represented himself to be the aggrieved one and construes the perfidy of the Ziphites as their loyalty to the king.

“Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtlety. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah” (1Sa 23:22-23). Before he journeyed to Ziph, Saul desired more specific information as to exactly where David was now located. He knew that the man he was after had a much better acquaintance than his own of that section of the country. He knew that David was a clever strategist—perhaps he had fortified some place, and the king wished for details, so that he might know how large a force would be needed to surround and capture David and his men. Apparently Saul felt so sure of his prey, he considered there was no need for hurried action.

The news that the Ziphites had proven unfaithful reached the ears of David, and though the king’s delay gave him time to retreat to the wilderness of Maon (1Sa 23:24), yet he was now in a sore plight. His situation was desperate and none but an Almighty hand could deliver him. Blessed is it to see him turning at this time unto the living God and spreading the urgent case before Him. It was then that he prayed the prayer that is recorded in Psalm 54, the superscription of which reads, “A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?” In it we are given to hear him pouring out his heart unto the Lord, and unto it we now turn to consider a few of its details.

“Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength” (Psa 54:1). David was in a position where he was beyond the reach of human assistance, only a miracle could now save him, therefore did he supplicate the miracle-working God. Without any preamble, David went straight to the point and cried, “Save me, O God.” Keilah would not shelter him, the Ziphites had basely betrayed him, Saul and his men thirsted for his blood. Other refuge there was none; God alone could help him. His appeal was to His glorious “Name,” which stands for the sum of all His blessed attributes and to His righteousness. “Judge me by thy strength” signifies: Secure justice for me, for none else will give it me. This manifested the innocence of his cause. Only when our case is pure can we call upon the power of divine justice to vindicate us.

“Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth” (Psa 54:2). How *we* need to remember and turn unto the Lord when enduring the contradiction of sinners against ourselves, to look above and draw strength from God, so that we be not weary and faint in our minds. Well did C. H. Spurgeon write, “As long as God hath an open ear we cannot be shut up in trouble. All other weapons may be useless, but all prayer is evermore available. No enemy can spike this gun.” “For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek

after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah” (Psa 54:3). Those who had no acquaintance with David, and so could have no cause for ill-will against him, were his persecutors—strangers were they to God. In such circumstance, it is well for us to plead before God that we are being hated for *His* sake.

We must not here expound the remainder of this Psalm. But let us note three other things in it. First, the marked change in the last four verses, following the “Selah” at the end of verse 3. On that word there Spurgeon wrote, “As if he said, ‘Enough of this, let us pause.’ He is out of breath with indignation. A sense of wrong bids him suspend the music awhile. It may also be observed, that more pauses would, as a rule, improve our devotions. We are usually too much in a hurry.” Second, his firm confidence in God and the assurance that his request would be granted. This appears in verses 4-6, particularly in the, “He *shall* reward evil unto mine enemies”—the “cut them off” was not spoken in hot revenge, but as an Amen to the sure sentence of the just Judge. Third, his absolute confidence that his prayer was answered—the “hath delivered me” of verse 7 is very, very striking and with it should be carefully compared and pondered Mark 11:24.

It now remains for us to observe *how* God answered David’s prayer. “And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain of the south of Jeshimon” (1Sa 23:24). The term “wilderness” is rather misleading to English ears. It is not synonymous with desert, but is in contrast from cultivated farmlands and orchards, often signifying a wild forest. “And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them” (1Sa 23:25-26). How often is such the case with us. Some sore trial presses and we cry unto God for relief, but before His answer comes, matters appear to get worse. Ah, that is in order that His hand may be the more evident.

David’s plight was now a serious one, for Saul and his men had practically enveloped them and only a “mountain,” or more accurately, a steep cliff, separated them. Escape seemed quite cut off—outnumbered, surrounded, further flight was out of the question. At last Saul’s evil object appeared to be on the very point of attainment. But man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. Beautifully did Matthew Henry comment, “This mountain (or cliff) was an emblem of the divine providence coming between David and the destroyer, like the pillar of cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians.” Yet, a few hours at most, and Saul and his army would either climb or go around that crag. Now for the striking and blessed sequel.

“But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth [The Rock of Divisions.] And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi” (1Sa 23:27-29). How marvelously and how graciously God times things! He who orders all events and controls all creatures, moved the Philistines to invade a portion of Saul’s territory, and tidings of this reached the king’s ear just at the moment David seemed on the brink of destruction. Saul at once turned his attention to the invaders and thus he was robbed of his prey and God glorified as his Protector. Thus, without striking a blow, David

was delivered. O how blessed to know that the same God is *for* His people today, and without them doing a thing He can turn away those who are harassing. God *does* hear and answer the prayer of faith! David and his little force now had their opportunity to escape, and fled to the strongholds of Engedi, on the shore of the Dead Sea.

COMING TO CHRIST

Part 1

By way of introduction let us bring before the readers the following Scriptures. (1) "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," Joh 5:40. (2) "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Mat 11:28. (3) "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him," Joh 6:44. (4) "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," Joh 6:37. (5) "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple," Luk 14:26-27. (6) "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious," 1Pe 2:4. (7) "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb 7:25.

The first of these passages applies to every unregenerate man and woman on this earth. While he is in a state of nature, no man can come to Christ. Though all excellencies, both divine and human, are found in the Lord Jesus, though He is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16), yet the fallen sons of Adam see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They may be well instructed in "the doctrine of Christ," they may believe unhesitatingly all that Scripture affirms concerning Him, they may frequently take His name upon their lips, profess to be resting on His finished work, sing His praises, yet their *hearts* are far from Him. The things of this world have the first place in their affections. The gratifying of self is their dominant concern. They surrender not their lives to Him. He is too holy to suit their love of sin. His claims are too exacting to suit their selfish hearts. His terms of discipleship are too severe to suit their fleshly ways. They *will not* yield to His Lordship—true alike with each one of us till God performs a miracle of grace upon our hearts.

The second of these passages contains a gracious invitation, made by the compassionate Savior to a particular class of sinners. The "all" is at once qualified, clearly and definitely, by the words which immediately follow it. The character of those to whom this loving word belongs is clearly defined—it is those who "labor" and are "heavy laden." Most clearly then it applies not to the vast majority of our light-headed, gay-hearted, pleasure-seeking fellows, who have no regard for God's glory and no concern about their eternal welfare. No, the word for such poor creatures is rather, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of

thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God *will* bring thee into judgment” (Ecc 11:9). But to those who have “labored” hard to keep the law and please God, who are “heavy laden” with a felt sense of their utter inability to meet His requirements, and who long to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin, Christ says, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”

The third passage quoted above at once tells us that “coming to Christ” is *not* the easy matter so many imagine it, nor so simple a thing as most preachers represent it to be. Instead of its so being, the incarnate Son of God positively declares that such an act is utterly impossible to a fallen and depraved creature unless and until divine power is brought to bear upon him. A most pride-humbling, flesh-withering, man-abasing word is this. “Coming to Christ” is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for by some Protestant “priest,” coming forward and taking some cheap-jack evangelist’s hand, signing some “decision” card, uniting with some “church,” or any other of the “many inventions” (Ecc 7:29) of man. Before any one can or will “come to Christ,” the understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken.

The fourth passage is also one that is unpalatable to the carnal mind, yet is it a precious portion unto the Spirit-taught children of God. It sets forth the blessed truth of unconditional election, or the discriminating grace of God. It speaks of a favored people whom the Father giveth to His Son. It declares that every one of that blessed company shall come to Christ—neither the effects of their fall in Adam, the power of indwelling sin, the hatred and untiring efforts of Satan, nor the deceptive delusions of blind preachers, will be able to finally hinder them—when God’s appointed hour arrives, each of His elect is delivered from the power of darkness and is translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. It announces that each such one who comes to Christ, no matter how unworthy and vile he be in himself, no matter how black and long the awful catalogue of his sins, He will by no means despise or fail to welcome him and under no circumstances will He ever cast him off.

The fifth passage is one that makes known the terms on which alone Christ is willing to receive sinners. Here the uncompromising claims of His holiness are set out. He must be crowned Lord of all or He will not be Lord at all. There must be the complete heart-renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him. He will brook no rival. All that pertains to “the flesh,” whether found in a loved one or in self, has to be hated. The “cross” is the badge of Christian discipleship, not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice ruling the heart. How evident is it, then, that a mighty, supernatural, divine work of grace *must* be wrought in the human heart, if any man will even *desire* to meet such terms!

The sixth passage tells us that the Christian is to *continue as he began*. We are to “come to Christ” not once and for all, but frequently, daily. He is the only one who can minister unto our needs and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from His “fullness” (Joh 1:16). In our weakness, we must turn to Him for strength. In our ignorance, we must apply to Him for wisdom. In our falls into sin, we must seek afresh His cleansing. *All* that we need for time and eternity is stored up in Him—refreshment when we are weary (Isa 40:31), healing of body when we are sick

(Exo 15:26), comfort when we are sad (1Pe 5:7), deliverance when we are tempted (Heb 2:18). If we have wandered away from Him, left our first love, then the remedy is to “repent, and do the *first* works” (Rev 2:5), that is, cast ourselves upon Him anew, come just as we did the first time we came to Him—as unworthy, self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

The seventh passage assures us of the eternal security of those who do come. Christ saves “unto the uttermost” or “for evermore” those who come unto God by Him. He is not of one mind today and of another tomorrow. No, He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1), and blessedly does He give proof of this, for “He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Inasmuch as *His* prayers are effectual, for He declares that the Father hearest Him “always” (Joh 11:42), none whose name is indelibly stamped on the heart of our great High Priest can ever perish. Hallelujah!

Having sought to thus introduce some of the leading aspects of the subject which is to engage our attention, we now propose to enter into some detail as the Spirit of truth is pleased to grant us His much-needed assistance. Let us consider some of the

I. Obstacles in coming to Christ.

Under this head it will be our endeavor to show *why* it is that the natural man is *unable* to “come to Christ.” As a starting point, let us again quote John 6:44, “No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him.” The reason why this is such a “hard saying,” even unto thousands who profess to be Christians, is because they utterly fail to realize the terrible havoc which the Fall has wrought, and it is greatly to be feared, because they are themselves strangers to “the plague” of their own hearts (1Ki 8:38). Surely if the Spirit had ever awakened them from the sleep of spiritual death and given them to see something of the dreadful state they were in by nature, and they had been brought to feel that the carnal mind *in them* was “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), then they would no longer cavil against this solemn word of Christ’s. But the spiritually dead can neither see nor feel spiritually.

Wherein lies the total inability of the natural man? 1. It is *not in the lack of the necessary faculties*. This needs to be plainly insisted upon or otherwise fallen man would cease to be a responsible creature. Fearful as were the effects of the Fall, yet they deprived man of none of the faculties with which God originally endowed him. True it is that the coming in of sin took away from man all power to use those faculties aright, that is, to employ them for the glory of his Maker. Nevertheless, fallen man possesses identically the same threefold nature of spirit and soul and body, as he did before the Fall. No part of man’s being was annihilated, though each part was defiled and corrupted by sin. True, man died spiritually, but death is not extinction of being—spiritual death is *alienation from God* (Eph 4:18). The spiritually dead one is very much alive and active in the service of Satan.

No, the inability of fallen man to “come to Christ” lies in no physical or mental defect. He has the same feet to take him unto a place where the Gospel is preached, as he has to walk with to a picture-show. He has the same eyes by which to read the Holy Scriptures, as he has to read the world’s newspapers. He has the same lips and voice for calling upon God, as he now uses in idle talk or foolish song. So too he has the same mental faculties for pondering the things of God and the concerns of eternity, as he now uses so diligently

in connection with his business. It is because of this that man “is without excuse” (Rom 1:20). It is the *misuse* of the faculties with which the Creator has endowed him which increases man’s guilt. Let every servant of God see to it that these things are constantly pressed upon their unsaved hearers.

2. We have to search deeper in order to find the seat of man’s spiritual impotency. His inability lies *in his corrupt nature*. Through Adam’s Fall, and through our own sin, our nature has become so debased and depraved that it is impossible for any man to “come to Christ,” to “love and serve Him,” to esteem Him more highly than all the world put together, and submit to His rule, until the Spirit of God renews him and implants a new nature. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters, nor an evil tree produce good fruit. Let us try and make this still clearer by an illustration. It is the *nature* of a vulture to feed upon carrion. True, it has the same bodily members to feed upon the wholesome grain the hens do, but it lacks the disposition and relish for it. It is the nature of a sow to wallow in the mire. True, it has the same legs as a sheep to conduct it to the meadow, but it lacks the desire for the green pastures. So it is with unregenerate man. He has the same physical and mental faculties as the regenerate has for the things and service of God, but he has no love for them.

Adam “begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). What an awful contrast is found here from that which we read two verses before, “God created man, in the likeness of God made He him.” In the interval, Adam had fallen, and a fallen parent could beget only a fallen child, transmitting unto him his own depravity. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). Therefore do we find the sweet singer of Israel declaring, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). Though, later, grace made him the man after God’s own heart, yet by nature, David (as we) was a mass of iniquity and sin. How early does this corruption of nature appear in children. “Even a child is known by his doings” (Pro 20:11). The evil bias of its heart is soon manifested—pride, self-will, vanity, lying, averseness to good, are the bitter fruits which quickly appear on the tender but vitiated twig.

3. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the complete darkness of his understanding*. This leading faculty of the soul has been despoiled of its primitive glory and covered over with confusion. Both mind and conscience are defiled “There is none that understandeth” (Rom 3:11). Solemnly did the apostle remind the saints “For ye were sometimes darkness” (Eph 5:8), not merely “in darkness,” but “darkness” itself. “Sin has closed the windows of the soul, darkness is over all the region. It is the land of darkness and shadow of death, where the light is as darkness. The prince of darkness reigns there and nothing but the works of darkness are framed there. We are born spiritually blind and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. This is thy case, whoever thou art, that art not born again” (Thomas Boston, 1680). “They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer 4:22).

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). There is in the unregenerate *an opposition* to what is spiritual and an aversion against it. God has made a revelation of His will unto sinners touching the way of salvation, yet they will not walk therein. They hear that Christ alone is able to save, yet they refuse to part with those things that hinder their coming to Him. They hear that it

is sin which slays the soul and yet they cherish it in their bosoms. They heed not the threats of God. Men believe that fire will burn them, and are at great pains to avoid it, yet they show by their actions that they regard the everlasting burnings as a mere scarecrow. The divine commandments are “holy, just, and good,” but men hate them, and observe them only so far as their respectability among men is promoted.

4. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the complete corruption of his affections*. “Man as he is, before he receives the grace of God, loves anything and everything above spiritual things. If ye want proof of this, look around you. There needs no monument to the depravity of the human affections. Cast your eyes everywhere—there is not a street, nor a house, nay, nor a heart, which doth not bear upon it sad evidence of this dreadful truth. Why is it that men are not found on the Sabbath day universally flocking to the house of God? Why are we not more constantly found reading our Bibles? How is it that prayer is a duty almost universally neglected? Why is Christ Jesus so little beloved? Why are even His professed followers so cold in their affections to Him? Whence arise these things? Assuredly, dear brethren, we can trace them to no other source than this, the corruption and vitiation of the affections. We love that which we ought to hate and we hate that which we ought to love. It is but human nature, fallen human nature, that man should love this present life better than the life to come. It is but the effect of the Fall, that man should love sin better than righteousness, and the ways of the world better than the ways of God” (C. H. Spurgeon, sermon on John 6:44).

The affections of the unrenewed man are wholly depraved and distempered. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately wicked*” (Jer 17:9). Solemnly did the Lord Jesus affirm that the affections of fallen man are a mother of abominations, “For from within [not from the devil!], out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mar 7:21-22). “The natural man’s affections are wretchedly misplaced. He is a spiritual monster. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth. His heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on, Acts 9:5. His face is towards hell, his back towards heaven, and therefore God calls to him to turn. He joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in. Glories in his shame and is ashamed of his glory. Abhors what he should desire and desires what he should abhor. Proverbs 2:13-15” (From Thomas Boston’s, *Fourfold State*).

5. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the total perversity of his will*. “‘Oh!’ said the Arminian, ‘men may be saved if they will.’ We reply, ‘My dear sir, we all believe that, but it is just the *if they will* that is the difficulty.’ We assert that no man *will* come to Christ unless he be drawn, Nay, we do not assert it, but *Christ* Himself declares it—‘Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life’ (Joh 5:40), and as long as that ‘ye will not come’ stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will. It is strange how people, when talking about free will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. ‘Now’ says one, ‘I believe men can be saved if they will.’ My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the Gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so

disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human being will ever be constrained towards Christ" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"Now here is a threefold card against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken—a blind mind, a perverse will, and disorderly, distempered affections. The mind, swelled with self-conceit, says the man should not stoop. The will, opposite to the will of God, says, he will not. And the corrupt affections rising against the Lord, in defense of the corrupt will, says, he shall not. Thus the poor creature stands out against God and goodness, till a day of power come, in which he is made a new creature" (Thomas Boston, 1676-1732). Perhaps some readers are inclined to say, "Such teaching as this is calculated to discourage sinners and drive them to despair." Our answer is, First, it is according to God's Word! Second, O that it may please Him to use this article *to* drive some to despair of all help from themselves. Third, it makes manifest the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's working with such depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, if they are ever to savingly come to Christ. And until this is clearly perceived, HIS aid will never be *really* sought in earnest!

DISPENSATIONALISM

1. The Promises of God

The general policy which we have steadily sought to follow during the past eleven years has been that of seeking (by divine aid) the spiritual edification of our Christian readers. For this we have endeavored to set forth a well-balanced constructive ministry. Poisons do not nourish, nor does the refutation of error build up the soul. Very occasionally have we departed from our rule, and only then against our spiritual inclinations, for we know full well it is difficult to handle pitch without being defiled. But once or twice we have felt forced to lift up our voice and sound an alarm. We feel constrained to do so again. While Paul was at Athens and saw the city wholly given up to idolatry, "his spirit was stirred in him," and as we behold the reckless and irreverent handling of the Word of God, by many who style themselves the teachers of "dispensational truth," and witness the pernicious effects it has produced in the minds and lives of many, we are moved by what is, we trust, a holy indignation.

It is not our present purpose to take up seriatim the various postulates of this modern school of prophetic interpretation, nor to examine in detail the wild conclusions which have been drawn from flimsy premises. Nor have we any expectation of converting from the error of their way any of the present-day leaders of this system which is growing in popularity. No, we would not waste valuable time on them, for it is our firm conviction that God has given them over to the spirit of delusion. If the Lord permits, we expect to deal with some other features of this "false doctrine" in later issues, but for the moment we confine our attention to one fearful evil which has been engendered by it, namely, the robbing of God's children of many "exceeding great and precious promises" (2Pe 1:4).

We are not unmindful of the subtle distinctions which have been drawn by the above-mentioned teachers between the interpretation and the application of Scripture, nor of their oft-repeated slogan that, "All Scripture is *for* us, but it is not all *to* us, or *about* us." Whatever may be thought of such a statement, this is clear and cannot be gainsaid, that there are now tens of thousands in Great Britain and the U.S.A. who say of large portions of God's Word, "This is not for me; this belongs to the Jews. This relates not to the present dispensation, that concerns those who will be on earth during the great tribulation or the millennium." And thus their souls are deprived of the *present* value of much which God Himself plainly declares is "profitable" for *us* (2Ti 3:16).

It may surprise some of our readers when we say that this limiting of so much of God's Word to the Jews is an *ancient* lie of the devil's dressed up in a new garb. Yet such it is. Nor should any be surprised at this news, for Scripture declares that, "There is *no new thing* under the sun" (Ecc 1:9). Two hundred and fifty years ago, in his work on "The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed," John Owen wrote, "Some labor much to *rob believers* of the consolation intended for them in the evangelical promises of the Old Testament, though made in the general to the church on this account, (affirming) that they were made to the Jews, and being to them peculiar, our concernment lieth not now in them." Over three hundred years ago, when the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (the "Episcopal Church") were drawn up, the 7th read as follows, "The Old Testament is not contradictory to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament *everlasting* life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and men, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old fathers (OLD TESTAMENT saints) did look *only for transitory promises*."

Almost four hundred years ago, John Calvin (1509-1564), in his "Institutes" began his chapter on, "The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments" by saying, "From the preceding observations it may now be evidenced, that all those persons, from the beginning of the world, whom God has adopted into the society of His people, have been federally connected with Him by the same law and the same doctrine which are in force among us, but because it is of no small importance that this point be established, I shall show, by way of appendix, since the fathers were partakers with us of the same inheritance and hoped for the same salvation through the grace of our common Mediator, how far their condition in this connection was different from ours. For though the testimonies we have collected from the law and the prophets in proof of this, render it sufficiently evident that the people of God have never had any other rule of religion and piety, yet because some writers have raised many disputes concerning the difference of the Old and New Testaments, which may occasion doubts in the mind of an undiscerning reader, we shall assign a particular chapter for the better and more accurate discussion of this subject. Moreover, what would otherwise have been very useful, has now been rendered necessary for us by Servetus and some madmen of the sect of the Anabaptists, who entertain no other ideas of the Israelitish nation than of a herd of swine, whom they pretend to have been pampered by the Lord, in this world without the least hope of future immortality in heaven."

One plain statement of Holy Writ is of infinitely more value than all the empty reasonings of carnal men. Such a statement we have concerning the promises of God in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the

glory of God by us.” The line of thought in the context is easily followed. First, the apostle had intended to pay the Corinthians a second visit (2Co 1:15-16), but he had been providentially hindered (2Co 1:8-10). Second, knowing that his enemies were likely to use his delay as a taunt that he was ignorant of the Lord’s mind and fickle in the keeping of his word, the apostle anticipates this charge (2Co 1:17-18)—there were divine reasons why Paul had delayed his promised journey to them. Third, whether that satisfied the Corinthians or no, this could not be gainsaid, that there was no uncertainty about his preaching. He had proclaimed Jesus Christ among them in a plain and positive way (2Co 1:19).

Having reminded the Corinthians that the message he had delivered in their hearing on his first visit was invariable and constant (2Co 1:19), the apostle now gave proof of his assertion—*Christ* was the sum and substance of his preaching. He had known nothing among them save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (see 1Co 2:2), and since Christ Himself is always “yea” or unchanging, then his message was always “yea” or the same. The manner in which he now supplied proof of this was by affirming, “*For* all the promises of God in him [viz. Christ] are yea, and in him [Christ], amen.” Therefore, Christ cannot be “yea *and* nay.” The plain meaning of 2 Corinthians 1:20 is—The promises which God has given His people are absolutely reliable, for they were made to them *in Christ*. They are absolutely certain of fulfillment, for they are accomplished *in Him*.

1. Since the Fall alienated the creature from the Creator, there could be no intercourse between God and man but by some promise on His part. None can challenge anything from the Majesty on High without a warrant from Himself, nor could the conscience be satisfied unless it had a divine promise for any good that we hope for from God. 2. God will have His people ruled by promises in all ages so as to exercise faith, hope, prayer, dependence upon Himself. God gives us promises to test whether or not we trust Him. 3. The ground of the promises is the God-man Mediator, Jesus Christ, for all intercourse between God and us can only be in and through the appointed Daysman. Christ must receive all good for us and we must have it at second hand from Him. Hence “all the promises of God *in him* [Christ] are yea and amen.”

4. Let the Christian be ever on his guard never to contemplate any promise of God *apart from* Christ, whether the thing promised, the blessing desired, be temporal or spiritual, we cannot rightly or truly enjoy it except in and by Christ. Therefore did Paul remind the Galatians, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16), about which (D.V.) we shall have more to say later. All the promises of good to us are made *to Christ*, the Surety of the everlasting covenant, and are conveyed from Christ to us—both the promises and the things promised. “This is *the* [all-inclusive] promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1Jo 2:25), and as 1 John 5:11 tells us, “This life is in his Son”—and so of “grace” and whatsoever is in Him. “If I read any of the promises, I found that all and every one contained Christ in their bosom, He Himself being the one great Promise of the Bible. *To Him* they were all first given; *from Him* they derive all their efficacy, sweetness, value, and importance; *by Him* they are brought home to the heart; and *in Him* they are all yea and amen” (Robert Hawker, 1810).

5. All the promises of God are made in Christ, none of them can be of any good to those who are out of Christ, for a man out of Christ is out of the favor of God. God cannot look on such a man but as an object of His wrath, as fuel for His vengeance. There is no hope for any man till he be in Christ. But it may be asked, Does not God do many good things to them that are out of Christ, sending His rain on the just as well as the unjust, and filling the bellies of the wicked with good things (Psa 17:14)? Yes, He does indeed, but are those temporal mercies *blessings*? Indeed they are not. As God says in Malachi 2:2, “I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart”—cf. Deuteronomy 28:15-20. Unto the wicked, the temporal mercies of God are like the food given to bullocks—they do but “prepare them for the day of slaughter” (Jer 12:3 and cf. Jam 5:5).

Having presented above a brief outline of the subject of the divine promises, let us now carefully observe the fact that 2 Corinthians 1:20 plainly affirms, “For *all* the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen.” How inexpressibly blessed is this to the humble-minded children of God—yet a mystery hidden from those who are wise in their own conceits. “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). The promises of God are many, relating both to this life and also to that which is to come, concerning our temporal well-being as well as our spiritual, covering the needs of the body as well as the soul, but whatever be their character, not one of them could be made good unto us except in and through and by Him who died for us.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2Co 7:1). *What* promises? Why, those mentioned in the closing verses of the preceding chapter, of course. There we read, “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; *as God hath said*, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2Co 6:16). And *where* had God said this? Why, away back in Leviticus 26:12, “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.” That was a promise made to Israel in the days of Moses! Again, in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 we read, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,” which words are a manifest reference unto Jeremiah 31:9 and Hosea 1:9-10.

Now observe very particularly what the Holy Spirit says about *these* “promises” unto the New Testament saints. He makes no mention of His “applying” them. He says nothing about our “appropriating” them. Instead, He assures us, “*Having* these promises.” Yes, “these” *Old* Testament “promises” are *ours*—ours to enjoy, ours to feed upon, ours to delight in, ours to give praise for. Since *Christ* is ours, *all* things are ours (1Co 3:22-23). O my reader, allow no man, under the pretense of “rightly dividing” the Word of truth, to cut you off from any of the “exceeding great and precious” promises of your Father. If *he* is determined to confine himself to a few epistles in the New Testament, let him do so—that is his loss, but suffer him not to confine *you* to so narrow a place.

One other passage shall engage our attention and we will close this article. Writing to the New Testament saints, the apostle Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to say, “Let your

conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: *for he hath said*, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). And *to whom* do you suppose this blessed “promise” was first given? Why, to Joshua—see Joshua 1:5. Well did John Owen (following his reference to the religious thieves of his day, who sought to rob believers of the consolation intended for them in the evangelical promises of the Old Testament) say, “If this plea might be admitted, I know not any one promise that would more evidently fall under the power of it, than this we have now in consideration. It was made to a peculiar person and that upon a peculiar occasion; made to a general or captain of armies, with respect to the great wars he had to undertake, upon the special command of God. May not a poor hungry believer say, What is this to me? I am not a general of an army, have no wars to make upon God’s command, the virtue of this promise doubtless expired with the conquest of Canaan, and died with him to whom it was made. To manifest *the sameness* of love, that is in *all* the promises, with their establishment in one Mediator, and the general concernment of believers in every one of them, however, and on what occasion soever given to any, this promise to Joshua is here applied to the condition of the weakest, meanest, and poorest of the saints of God; to all, and every one of them, be their state and condition what it will. And doubtless, believers are not a little wanting in themselves, and their own consolation, that they do no more particularly close with those words of truth, grace, and faithfulness, which upon sundry occasions, and at divers times, have been given out unto the saints of old, even Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the residue of them, who walked with God in their generations: these things in an especial manner are recorded for *our* consolation, that we ‘through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope’ (Rom 15:4).

“Now the Holy Spirit, knowing the weakness of our faith, and how apt we are to be beaten from closing with the promises, and from mixing them with faith, upon the least discouragement that may arise (as indeed this is none of the least—the promise is not made to us, it was made to others, and they may reap the sweetness of it. God may be faithful in it, though we never enjoy the mercy intended in it, I say), in the next words, He leads believers by the hand to make the same conclusion with boldness and with confidence from this and the like promises, as David did of old, upon the many gracious assurances that he had received of the presence of God with him, ‘So that [saith He, upon the account of that promise] we may say boldly [without staggering at it by unbelief] the Lord is *my* Helper.’ This is a conclusion of faith, because God said to Joshua, a believer, ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee’—though upon a particular occasion and in reference to a particular employment—*every* believer may say with boldness, ‘He is *my* Helper’.”

LETTER TO A DEEPLY EXERCISED SOUL

Dear A.—You doubtless will be surprised that so humble and unworthy an individual as myself should attempt to address you. It is however by no means uncongenial, with my feelings, though under a deep sense of my utter inability to do so, suitable, but, “Unto thee

lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens;" for Thou seest every secret and hidden thing and Thou knowest Thy handmaid altogether, and searchest all the hearts of the children of men. O minister to her present necessities, though the unworthiest of Thy creatures whom Thou hast brought up from the pit of corruption, and saved from the lowest hell, and raised from the gates of the grave, to tell her fellow-sinners that Thou hast saved to the uttermost. However low they may be sunk in the mire, Thine arm can reach them and Thy salvation set them on high. Breathe, Holy Comforter!—instruct Holy Teacher!—or we shall read and write in vain.

Dear A.—you lately desired to know of *yourself*. But O you little thought what the horrifying sight and awful realization of evil which the granting of such a desire would bring. Perhaps you hoped for more solid assurances that you were *right* by having your heart turned inside out. But verily such a laying open of ourselves to ourselves makes all appear *wrong*. Perhaps you thought the painful sight would soften you into tears of penitence, and the humbling view lay you gently down in the dust of self-abasement, and that thus, as a polluted sinner, you should weep and love at the dear Redeemer's feet. But ah! These blessed feelings are more from the joys of salvation than the dark discoveries of guilt, more in being found than feeling we are lost. To know yourself and what your sin is, methinks you could not bear to the full extent. The corruption of fallen humanity is so offensive, its deceptiveness so deep, its outrage against omnipotence so daring, and its callousness under all so impenetrable, that surely the fullest sense of it must crush finite worms into despair and drive them out of existence. But mark, it would never bring them to the Mercy-seat. It would not fill them with prayer, and hope, and humble cries for pardon. The terrible majesty and holiness of the Being sinned against, and the feeling of His fearful and dreadful power, and justice, would strike the soul to a farther and farther distance from Him, not in the *softness* of contrition, but in the hardening of hopelessness. I do humbly believe that would be the effect of discovering the whole depth of our depravity in the full light of Jehovah's strict holiness, such will be the effect, in a lesser degree, as we discover some of that depravity by some rays of that searching light, for it is "light that maketh manifest." As Adam when he discovered his nakedness, did not run to God, but from Him, so it is with every soul of man, and so it seems with you. For you say that under insensibility, hardness, and carelessness, you are not driven to the throne of grace, but to the contrary. Sin does not bring forth *life*, but sin, when it is finished, "bringeth forth *death*," and as it works, produces deathliness of feeling.

All do not learn the mystery of iniquity to the same extent, but it is decreed every soul that is saved shall feel something of its painful experience, something of what they are saved from and out of, as well as what they are saved unto. In learning this, they find a strange work. In this lesson, many hard sayings which they can hardly bear. They have read that the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," and "that he who trusts in his own heart, is a fool." But they find it a very different thing to *feel* the deceivableness of unrighteousness at work within, and to be brought off from trusting the heart, because they feel its treachery and vileness. They have *confessed* they were sinners and believed it, but to *feel* sin working distance, darkness, coldness, and hardness, is experimental proof of sinnership, which feels more like *destruction* than *salvation*, and seems very far from drawing them to God. Should this present year of your life be spent

chiefly under this dark discipline, you will often feel that if the blessing *is* coming, it is indeed “cross-handed” and that if prayer is being answered, it is truly by most unexpected contraries. Nevertheless, as the Stone cut out of the mountain without hands must destroy all kingdoms that it may fill the whole earth, so must this wondrous Stone break in pieces in our souls the iron, brass, clay, the silver, and the gold (Dan 2:34)—things that we have counted refuse and things that we have held in estimation. All that is ours must come forth to destruction that we may be saved and Christ to us “all in all.” He cannot fill us while we are filled, or half filled, with anything else, seem it badness or goodness. Whatever form it may assume, be it not Christ, it is naught and is a work of the flesh or the devil. But for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1Jo 3:8). He comes to the renewed soul as a “refiner’s fire and as fuller’s soap,” but who may “abide the day of His coming?” (Mal 3:2). None but those whom He has created anew in Himself. All that is of our flesh shall be as stubble before Him, and we need not fear its destruction, for it will ever do wickedly. And bless His holy name, He will take care of the jewel, the precious *life* which He has implanted in the soul, while He deals thus roughly with our deeds of darkness. He is only bringing us to what we often talk about—to be nothing, that He may be all in all, and that we may glory in Him alone.

You say, how much of self you see working in your past life. You see truly, but you see not half of the abominations of this image that “provoketh to jealousy.” I have been here before you and I speak from experience, and though turned again and again to see greater abominations of self, which were to issue in the lifting up of “Jesus on high” in my soul, into which He came like the ark into Dagon’s temple (1Sa 5:4), when His powerful presence caused the hateful self which I had set up to fall prostrate and lose its head and feet, so that now it is good for nothing and can neither work nor walk, though it would often pretend. As said Delilah to Samson, “The Philistines be upon thee,” (Jud 16:20) so would I say to this marring, proud, hateful, self, “The power of Christ’s death be ever upon thee” (2Co 4:10). Nothing else will ever bring it down, and as the Holy Spirit first leads us through the “chambers of imagery” and reveals the hidden things of our own darkness, so does He afterwards reveal Christ and gives us *victory* through Him. The Holy Spirit breathes upon our fancied godliness (Isa 40:6-7) to make it wither, so is it that the beauty of the Lord our God (Psa 90:17) may be upon us, that we may understand those sweet words, “Ye are complete in him,” and that “he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.”

You complain that the Bible which you once enjoyed is now to you a sealed book. May not this be another answer to know, or to your desire to know, more of *yourself*? For you find that yourself may read the Word, quote the Word, and have some judgment and light in the Word, yet you cannot find the Word and eat it and make it the joy and rejoicing of your soul. Yourself cannot unlock the secrets contained therein, cannot receive “the sincere milk of the word, so that ye may grow thereby,” (1Pe 2:2) or eat the strong meats when you please. May you not hereby be learning that you are not ignorant in divine things and that Christ must be your wisdom?—that you are powerless and that He must be the power of God unto you for salvation and instruction in righteousness? May not the Holy Spirit be going forth in your soul like the voice of John in the wilderness, to “prepare the way of the Lord” (Mar 1:3, Isa 40:3) before Him, and to make straight in your seemingly desert heart

a highway for our God? And may He not, ere long, say to you with almighty power, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world?" (Joh 1:29). When by faith you behold Jesus as your Surety and Savior standing in your law-place, bearing your sin and guilt, and delivering your soul from punishment, by being Himself your ransom, then will your heart dissolve and tears of thankfulness flow. Having sweet forgiveness, you will love Him much and desire "to know no will but His." "Old things will pass away and all things become new," See 2Co 5:17 and you will become a new creature in a new world, whilst His gracious presence remains with you.

May it please the Lord that your painful exercise may end in this glorious issue. There are those now triumphing in Christ who have traveled mournfully through this wilderness of self before you and found it a land of darkness and drought and shadow of death, and thought while in it that it was a land which none of the Lord's living ones ever passed through. But He turned for them the shadows of death into morning. May He also do a sure work in your soul and give you feelingly to say, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isa 38:17).

Your letter made me weep well, knowing the bitterness of the "wormwood and gall." "My soul hast thou still in remembrance, and is humbled in me." I had hoped that the Lord was going to bring you forth to the light, that you might behold His righteousness. I have not come unto you with smooth things, but having spread yours before the Lord, who knoweth the end from the beginning (See Isa 46:10). Such as I have, give I unto thee. If He said it, may He bless it to your soul's benefit, and He shall have the glory. If not, may my unworthy self be pardoned.

I remain, yours ever affectionately, ONE WHO HAS BEEN IN THE FURNACE, 1850.

ASSURANCE

Dialogue 1

The article which appeared in the last issue really completed our present treatment of this theme. It has since occurred to us though that perhaps some would be helped were we to further explain and amplify one or two of the leading points. Really, this ought not to be necessary, yet Scripture tells us that it is "line upon line" (Isa 28:10). Moreover, in view of the error which now so widely abounds and the confusion which beclouds so many minds, it is hardly to be expected that one can unlearn in a few hours what he has been mistakenly receiving as God's truth for so many years. Doubtless not a few of our readers wish they had the opportunity for a personal conversation on the subject, so that they could state their difficulties and ask questions on anything that is not yet clear to them. We have therefore decided to write two further articles in the form of dialogues, introducing widely different characters, who express a desire to discuss the subject. The first is,

Mr. Carnal Confidence. "Good morning, Mr. Editor, I wish to have a talk with you about those articles on 'Assurance' which you published in last year's 'Studies.' The Writer: "Be seated, please. First of all, may we courteously but frankly inform you that our time is already fully occupied in seeking to minister unto God's dear children, yet we are never too busy to do all in our power to help a needy soul." Carnal Confidence: "O I am not seeking help, my purpose in calling is to point out some things in your articles where I am quite sure you erred." The Writer: "It is written, dear friend, 'If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know' (1Co 8:2), therefore I trust that God will ever give me grace to willingly consider and weigh the views of others and receive through them anything *He* may have for me. Yet, on the other hand, I am not prepared to *debate* with any man upon divine things."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "Well, I am quite sure that I am right and you are wrong, and I feel it my duty to tell you so." The Writer: "Very good, I am ready to listen unto what you have to say, only reminding you again that I cannot enter into a debate with you, for the things of God are too holy to *argue* about, though a friendly discussion, in the right spirit, may prove mutually helpful. Before beginning, shall we seek the help of the Holy Spirit that He may graciously subdue the flesh in each of us, guide our conversation so that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts may be 'acceptable' in God's sight (Psa 19:14), remembering that for every idle word each of us will yet have to give an account."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "I consider that in your articles you have made a very difficult and complicated matter out of what is really very simple. According to your ideas, a person has to go to a lot of trouble in order to discover whether or not he is saved, whereas if a man believes God's Word he may be sure in a moment." The Writer: "But are all those who believe God's Word really *saved*? Did not the Jews of Christ's day believe implicitly in the divine authorship of the Old Testament? Do not Russellites and others today insist loudly upon their faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible? Does not the devil himself believe the same?" Mr. Carnal Confidence: "That is not what I meant. My meaning is that, if I rest upon some verse of Holy Writ as God's promise to me, then I know He cannot disappoint me." The Writer: "That is just the same in principle. Does not the Romanist rest with full confidence upon that declaration of Christ's, 'This is My body'? Saving faith is not faith in the authenticity of any verse of Scripture, but rather faith in the Person of Him who gave us the Scriptures, faith in the Christ who is made known in the Scriptures."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "Yes, I know that, and I *do* believe in God and in His Son, and I *know* that I am saved because He says so." The Writer: "Where in Scripture does God say that *you* are saved?" Mr. Carnal Confidence: "In John 5:24, in Acts 16:31, and many other places." The Writer: "Let us turn to these passages please. In John 5:24, the Lord Jesus describes one who has 'passed from death unto life.' He tells us two things about that individual which serve to *identify* him. First, 'he that heareth my word.' That is definite enough. But of course it means far more than simply listening to His Word with the outward ear." Mr. Carnal Confidence: "Ah, right there you want to mystify what is simple, and perplex souls with what is quite clear." The Writer: "Pardon me, you are mistaken. I only wish to *rightly understand* the words God has used, and to do this it is necessary to carefully compare Scripture with Scripture and discover how each word is *used* by the

Spirit.” Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I object. That may be all right for you, but common people do not have the leisure for deep study. God knew this and has written His word in plain language that ordinary folks can understand. ‘Hear’ means ‘hear,’ and that is all there is to it.”

The Writer: “I believe you are quite sincere in what you have said and you have expressed the view which a great many hold today, but if you will allow me to say so, it is a very defective one. God places no premium upon laziness. God has so ordered things that nothing is obtained without diligence and industry. Much work and care has to be devoted to a garden if anything is obtained from it. The same holds good every where else. What time and trouble is required in order to keep our bodies in working order! Can, then, the eternal concerns of our *souls* be more lightly dismissed or more easily secured? Has not God bidden us ‘*Buy the truth*’ (Pro 23:23)? Has He not plainly told us, ‘If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and *searchest* for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God’ (Pro 2:3-5)?”

The Writer: “Mark *how* the Israelites were fed of old in the wilderness, Exodus 16. God did not provide them with baked loaves of bread ready to eat. No, instead, He gave them manna from heaven, which was ‘a *small* round thing’ (Exo 16:14). Work and patience were called for in order to ‘gather’ (Exo 16:17) it. Note too, ‘When the sun waxed hot, it melted’ (Exo 16:21), so that they had to get up early to secure it! Moreover, the manna would not keep, ‘Let no man leave of it till the morning,’ it ‘bred worms and stank’ (Exo 16:19-20) if they tried to preserve it for another day. Then, after it had been gathered, the manna had to be ‘ground in mills or beaten in a mortar,’ and baked in pans and made into cakes (Num 11:8). All of this typified the fact that if a soul is to eat the Bread of Life, he must devote himself in earnest and as Christ says, ‘*Labor...for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life*’ (Joh 6:27).”

The Writer: “Thus it is in connection with the obtaining of a right understanding of any verse of Scripture. Pains have to be taken with it, patience has to be exercised, and prayerful study engaged in. Returning to John 5:24: The one who has passed from death unto life, says Christ, is he that ‘*heareth* My word.’ Let us turn then to other passages where this term is found. ‘They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to *hear* my words’ (Jer 11:10). ‘Because ye have *not heard* my words, behold I will send and take all the families of the north’ etc. (Jer 25:8-9). And see Jeremiah 35:17, Zechariah 1:4, Matthew 7:24, John 10:27. In all of these verses, and in many others which might be given, to ‘hear’ means to *heed* what God says, to *act upon* it, to *obey* Him. So he who ‘hears’ the voice of Christ *heeds* His command to turn away from all that is opposed to God and become in subjection to Him.

Mr. Carnal Confidence: “Well, let us turn to Acts 16:31, that is simple enough. There is no room allowed there for any quibbling. God says, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ God says that *to me*. I have believed on Christ and so I must be saved.” Writer: “Not so fast, dear friend. How can you prove God says that *to you*? Those words were spoken under unusual circumstances and to a particular individual. That individual had been brought to the end of himself. He was deeply convicted of his sins. He was in terrible anguish of soul. He had taken his place in the dust, for we are told that he

'came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas' (Act 16:29). Now is it fair to take the words of the apostles to *such* a man and apply them indiscriminately to anybody? Are we justified in ignoring the whole setting of that verse, wrenching it from its context, and giving it to those who have not any of the characteristics which marked the Philippian jailer?"

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "I refuse to allow you to browbeat me and move me from the simplicity of the Gospel. John 3:16 says, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Now I *have* believed on the Son and therefore am fully assured that I possess eternal life." Writer: "Are you aware of the fact that in this same Gospel of John, we are told, 'Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them' (Joh 2:23-24)? There were many who 'believed' in Christ who were not saved by Him, see John 8:30 and note verse 59! John 12:42-43! There is a believing in Christ which saves and there is a believing in Him which does not save, and therefore it behooves every sincere and earnest soul to diligently examine *his* 'faith' by Scripture and ascertain *which* kind it is. There is too much at stake to take anything for granted. Where eternal destiny is involved surely no trouble can be too great for us to make sure."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "I *am* sure, and no man can make me doubt." Writer: "Is your faith purifying your heart (Act 15:9)? Is it evidenced by those works which God requires (Jam 2:17)? Is it causing you to overcome the world (1Jo 5:4)?" Mr. Carnal Confidence: "O I don't claim to be perfect, but I *know* whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Writer: "We did not ask if you were perfect, but have you been made a new creature in Christ, have old things passed away, and all things become new (2Co 5:17)? Are you treading the path of obedience, for God's Word says, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (1Jo 2:4)."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "I am not occupied with myself, but with Christ. I am not concerned about my walk, but with what He did for poor sinners." Writer: "To be 'occupied with Christ' is rather a vague expression. Are you occupied with His authority, have you surrendered to His Lordship, have you taken His yoke upon you, are you following the example which He has left His people? Christ cannot be *divided*. He is not only Priest to be trusted, but is also Prophet to be heeded, and King to be subject unto. Before He can be truly 'received,' the heart must be emptied of all those idols which stand in competition with Him. It is not the adulation of our lips, but the affection of our souls, which He requires. It is not an intellectual assent, but the heart's surrender to Him which saves."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "You are departing from the simplicity of the Gospel. You are making additions unto its one and only stipulation. There is nothing that God requires from the sinner except that he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Writer: "You are mistaken. The Lord Jesus said, '*Repent ye*, and believe the Gospel' (Mar 1:15)." Mr. Carnal Confidence: "That was *before* the cross, but in *this* dispensation repentance is not demanded." Writer: "Then according to your ideas, God has changed the plan of salvation. But you err. *After* the cross, Christ charged His disciples, 'That repentance and remission of sins should be

preached in his name among all nations' (Luk 24:47). If we turn to the book of Acts, we find that the apostles preached repentance in this dispensation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter bade the convicted Jews to 'repent' (Act 2:38). Reviewing his ministry at Ephesus, Paul declared that he had testified both to Jews and also to the Greeks 'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Act 20:21), while in Acts 17:30, we are told that God 'now commandeth *all* men every where to *repent*.'

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "Then do you insist that if a person has not repented, he is still unsaved?" Writer: "Christ Himself says so, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish' (Luk 13:5). So too if a man has not been converted, he is yet unsaved, 'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out' (Act 3:19). There must be a right-about-face. There must be a turning from Satan unto God, from the world unto Christ, from sin unto holiness. Where *that* has not taken place, all the believing in the world will save no one. Christ saves none who is still in love with sin, but He is ready to save those who are sick of sin, who long to be cleansed from its loathsome foulness, who yearn to be delivered from its tyrannizing power. Christ came here to save His people *from* their sins."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "You talk to me as though I were the helpless slave of strong drink or some other appetite, but I want you to know I was never the victim of any such thing." Writer: "There are other lusts in fallen man besides those which break forth in gross outward sins, such as pride, covetousness, selfishness, self-righteousness, and unless they be mortified, they will take a man to hell as surely as will profanity, immorality, or murder. Nor is it enough to mortify these inordinate affections. The fruit of the Spirit, the graces of godliness, must also be brought forth in the heart and life, for it is written, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). And therefore it is a pressing duty for each of us to heed the divine exhortation, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' (2Co 13:5)."

"Notice very carefully, dear friend, that the one point pressed upon the Corinthians was 'that Jesus Christ is *in* you,' and not their trusting that He died for them. Just as the Christian can only discover that his name was written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world, by discerning that God has written His laws in his heart (Heb 10:16), so I can ascertain that Christ *died for me* only by making sure that He now *lives in me*. And it is obvious that if the Holy One indwells me that His presence must have wrought a radical change both in character and in conduct. *This*, above everything else, is what we sought to make clear and emphasized in our articles on 'Assurance,' namely, the imperative necessity of our making sure that the Lord Jesus occupies the throne of our hearts, has the supreme place in our affections, and regulates the details of our lives. Unless *this* be the case with us, then our profession is vain and all our talk of trusting in Christ's finished work is but idle words."

Mr. Carnal Confidence: "I consider all you have said to be but the language of a Pharisee. You are occupied with your own fancied goodness and delighting in your own worthless righteousness." Writer: "Pardon me, but I rather rejoice in what Christ's Spirit has wrought in me and pray that He will carry forward that work of grace to the glory of His name. But we must bring our discussion to a close. I would respectfully urge you to

attend unto that exhortation addressed to all professing Christians, ‘Give diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (2Pe 1:10).” Mr. Carnal Confidence: “I shall do nothing of the sort. I *hate* the very word ‘election.’ I know that I am saved, though I do not measure up to the impossible standard you want to erect.” Writer: “Fare thee well. May it please the Lord to open your blind eyes, reveal to you His holiness, and bring you to His feet in godly fear and trembling.”

