

Vol. XXIV

January, 1945

No. 1

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

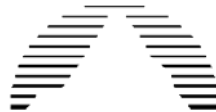
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Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney,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

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

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THE CHANGING YEARS BUT GOD UNCHANGING

When we were young, the transition from December to January meant little more to us than the need for another calendar and registering the new date on our letters. There was no solemn realization that another milestone had been passed in the short journey of life, and that we were 365 days nearer a never-ending Eternity—to spend the same, either as a regenerated soul in the Courts of holiness and everlasting bliss, or to be cast as a righteously abhorred sinner into the Region of unutterable woe, there to suffer the due reward of our iniquities for ever and ever. But since Divine mercy apprehended us and gave us the spirit of a sound mind, and as we grow older, the passing of each year impresses us more deeply with the mutability of all things mundane and of our own mortality. As each fleeting year witnesses the call hence of one and another, we are reminded that the same call may likely come to us ere 1945 expires; and therefore, it behoves us to see to it that our own house is set in order.

With the changing years, come also the vicissitudes of life. True, that has been the case all through human history, but it seems to have been more pronounced of late. What alterations have been witnessed in every sphere during the last few decades! Probably most of our readers would have discredited anyone who, a generation ago, was able to forecast the principal conditions now prevailing. Even the few who had sufficient discernment to see the coming events, which were casting their dark shadows before them, were unable to foresee more than the general outline of what is now before them in detail. Whether we view the situation in the military, the political, the social, or the religious sphere, things have deteriorated and degenerated more than even the pessimistic conceived likely. Nor can the most experienced and sagacious prognosticate with any degree of certainty how much further the downward trend will go, how much lower moral and spiritual values will sink, nor how much which is still prized will be sucked into the maelstrom of destruction. Yes, the changing years are bringing with them great changes in living conditions—changes which are solemn to contemplate, and fearful to experience.

But if there was nothing more to be said, we would not have penned the above. Yet, what has been pointed out needs to be considered if we are to really appreciate what follows. That which most impresses the writer by the changing years is that we have *an unchanging God*. “Thy years,” said the Psalmist, “shall have no end” (Psa 102:27). He is unaffected by the flight of time, uninfluenced by all the mutations of things and creatures here below. “Semper Idem” (“always the same”) is inscribed upon his brow: “from everlasting to everlasting, thou art *God*” (Psa 90:2). This perfection of the Divine character does not occupy the place in our hearts and thoughts which it should. It is one of the choicest jewels in the diadem of God’s attributes. The immutability of God is the guarantor of His fidelity: “The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent [change His mind]” (1Sa 15:29). Likewise, the immutability of God guarantees the security of His people: “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6)—closely as they may resemble Jacob.

God’s immutability is one of His communicable perfections. He imparts life to the lower creatures, wisdom to man, holiness to the angels—but immutability unto none. To speak of an immutable creature would be a contradiction in terms: If *immutable*, it would not be a “creature;” instead of being dependent, he would be independent, and therefore a God; instead of a subject, he would be Sovereign. God did not bestow immutability upon Adam at the beginning, when He pronounced him “very good” (Gen 1:31), for he had been incapable of falling had that been imparted. The arch-angel possesses it not; nor will the saints in Heaven. Immutability is entirely peculiar unto God Himself: There is no growth or development in Him. He is ever the same: The self-existent, all-sufficient, eternal, unchanging God. “I AM THAT I AM” (Exo 3:14) is His glorious name, and that which expresses His nature. What a truly marvelous and awe-inspiring Being! Nothing can be taken from, nothing added to Him. With Him, there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17).

“But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?” (Job 23:13). None can sway Him or induce Him to alter His eternal purpose. The clearest, yet most solemn, demonstration of that was made in Gethsemane—when the incarnate Son on His face, in an agony, cried, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). God would not change His mind: The terms of the everlasting covenant must stand! It is this perfection of God’s which supplies the most conclusive proof of the error of Universalism, which predicates that after certain “ages,” the wicked will be

released from Hell. Not so, and why? Because those whom the Lord abhors, He abhors forever! That "I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal 3:6) has a two-fold bearing: A blessed and a solemn one. Unto the saved, it is unspeakably blessed—"having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1); but those whom He hates, He will hate for all eternity. Before the wicked could be released from Hell, the very nature and character of God must change—to be reversed.

"Thou art the same" (Psa 102:27). Not "Thou hast been" nor "Thou wilt be," but "Thou *art* the same." The same in nature and character, the same in will and purpose—without fluctuation within, or alteration without. Though His works of creation decay, though the operations of His providence vary, and though even the activities of His grace differ from time to time, yet the Lord God Himself is ever "the same." How blessed that He is so! What strength, calmness, and comfort does this bring to the heart which has a believing apprehension of the same. What a sure foundation does this provide for faith to rest upon: That He who failed not the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, our own fathers who trusted in Him, is just the same now unto those who turn to Him in the present upheaval. "When heaven and earth shall flee away from the dreadful presence of the great Judge, He will be unaltered by the terrible confusion, and the world in conflagration will effect no change in Him" (C. H. Spurgeon). The Christian may lose his dearest earthly friends, but not his heavenly Friend. The years of those clothed with mortality are but few at most, but those of Him who "only hath immortality" (1Ti 6:16) are without beginning and without end.

Because the holy Scriptures are inspired by God, they too, are immutable. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa 119:89). That was Luther's sheet-anchor amid the fierce gales that for so long burst upon him. Resting on that "impregnable Rock," his heart was kept in perfect peace; and thereby, he was enabled to wax strong and very courageous. We, too, are living in stormy times, but thank God the same sure Anchor is available for us. While everything is crumbling around us, the monuments of the centuries being reduced to rubble, the thrones of kings being overturned, the plans and policies of men cast into the melting pot, the Divine Oracles are unaffected, unimpaired, unchanged—for the Word of God, like its Author, "liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pe 1:23). His own infallible promise is: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mat 24:35; Mar 13:31; Luk 21:33).

Because the Redeemer is God the Son, He also is immutable: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb 13:8). He is the same merciful Saviour as pardoned the dying thief. He is the same long-suffering Master, as bore so patiently with the dulness of His disciples. He is the same sufficient One as multiplied the loaves and fishes, and thereby provided for a great multitude. He is the same Physician as healed the leper and gave sight to the blind. He is the same faithful Intercessor as prayed for poor Peter. He is the same compassionate One as wept by the graveside of Lazarus. When His forerunner was murdered, we are told that His disciples "went and told Jesus" (Mat 14:12). Why? Was it not because they would pour out their grief unto One whom they knew had a sympathetic ear, who could be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and who would comfort and strengthen them? If then your heart be torn with anxiety or bowed down with sorrow, go and do likewise. Let our New Year's resolution be to make more use of Christ in 1945 than we ever have before.

This blessed truth of the Divine immutability is many-sided in its application. Because God changes not, His *promises* are unailing and may be relied upon at all times: "Thy testimonies are very sure" (Psa 93:5). For the same reason, we know that His *threatenings* must be fulfilled. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num 23:19). Because He changes not, the mediatorial throne is forever one of *grace*. It was there that He received us when first we came to Him as empty-handed beggars; it is there He still welcomes us when we pocket our pride and humbly, but boldly, seek fresh supplies "to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). Even in the eternal state, it will be "the throne of God *and* of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1). Then make use of this Divine attribute—plead it in your prayers. Amid all the fluctuations and vexations of 1945, remember that God changes not. Remind yourself of that blessed fact each day.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

13. 2 Corinthians 13:14 – Part 2

In our last, instead of entering into a detailed exposition of this verse, we dwelt upon its central theme and sought to show it sets forth the Christian doctrine of God. In developing that grand truth, we pointed out that we are indebted, supremely, to the Lord Jesus Christ for the full and final revelation of the character and perfections of Deity. Whatever be revealed of God in creation, in the governance of this world, or in the Old Testament, it is in and by the incarnate Son that the Father has been most clearly declared. Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15); and therefore, did He affirm, “he that seeth me seeth him that sent me” (Joh 12:45); and again, “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (Joh 15:24). But as the query of His apostle intimated, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (Joh 14:22), it was a spiritual revelation to the hearts of His own, in which that manifestation mainly consisted.

The Christian Benediction, then, enunciates the foundational doctrine of Christianity, for no one is entitled to be regarded as a Christian who does not believe and acknowledge *the Triune God*, and that is why Scripture requires all who avow themselves Christians to be baptized into “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mat 28:19)—for that is the initiating confession of faith for all who would enter the kingdom of Christ, and the inspired formula with which believers are to be received into His fellowship: Three Persons, one God. The Divine Trinity lies at the basis of all New Testament teaching. The Redeemer claimed to be equal with God, one with the Father, and ever spoke of the Spirit as being both Personal and Divine. The apostles everywhere proclaimed His doctrine and recognised the threefold distinction in the Persons of the Godhead. The equal Deity and honour of the Son and Spirit with the Father is the mystery and glory of the Gospel they preached, and by which we are saved—the denial of it is conclusive proof of being unsaved. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3), and the “only true God” is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is known in and through Jesus Christ the one Mediator.

That the revelation of the Triune God constitutes the doctrinal foundation of Christianity is easily capable of demonstration. First, as pointed out above, the true God subsists in three co-essential and co-eternal Persons; and therefore, he who worships any but the Triune God is merely rendering homage to a figment of his own imagination. He who denies the personality and absolute Deity of either the Father, the Son, or the Spirit is not a Christian, but a heretic, and the saints are bidden to have no fellowship with him (2Jo 1:10). Second, because there is no salvation possible for any sinner, save that of which the Triune God is the Author. It is a serious mistake to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, to the exclusion of the saving operations of both the Father and the Spirit. Had not the Father eternally purposed the salvation of His elect in Christ (Eph 1:3, 4), had He not entered into an everlasting covenant with Him and commissioned the Son to become incarnate and redeem His people, He had never left Heaven in order that He might die the Just for the unjust.

The salvation of the Church is ascribed to the Father: “Who hath *saved* us, and called us with an holy calling...according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before* the world began” (2Ti 1:9). The Father then was our Saviour long before Christ died to become such—and thanksgiving is due Him for the same. Equally necessary are the operations of the Spirit to actually apply to the hearts of God’s elect the good of what Christ did for them. It is the Spirit who convicts them of sin and who imparts saving faith to them. Therefore is our salvation also ascribed to Him: “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13). A careful reading of Titus 3:4-6 shows the three Persons together in this connection, for “God our Saviour” in verse 4 is plainly the Father, and “*he* saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the *Holy Ghost*; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Tit 3:5, 6).

Third, because it is by the distinctive operations of the Holy Three that our varied needs are supplied. Do we not *need* “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”? Is not our most urgent experimental requirement to come to Him constantly and draw from the “fulness” of grace which is treasured up for us in Him (Joh 1:16)? If we would obtain “grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16), then we must betake ourselves to that Throne on which the Mediator sits. And do we not also need “the love of God”—that is, fresh manifesta-

tions of it, new apprehensions thereof? Are we not bidden to “keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jud 1:21)? And do we not equally need “the communion of the Holy Ghost” (2Co 13:14)? What would become of us if He renewed us not day by day in the inner man (2Co 4:16; Eph 3:16). What would be our prayer-life, if He no longer “helpeth our infirmities” and “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26, 27).

Like the virgin birth of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is one of the mysteries of the Faith. The first truth presented to faith is the Being of the true and living God, and this we knew not from any discovery of reason, but because He has revealed it in His Word. The next grand truth is that the one living and true God has made Himself known to us under the threefold relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and this we know on the same authority as the first. They are equally above reason, and real Christians do not attempt to fathom them; yet their incomprehensibility, so far from being any objection, is a necessary condition of their confidence in revelation and faith in Him who is revealed. Had the Bible presented no heights beyond the powers of reason to scale, had it contained no depths unfathomable to the keenest mental acumen, this writer for one had discarded it as being nothing more than a human production and imposture. For our part, we would no more worship a “god” that we could measure by our intellect than we would honour an image that our hands fashioned.

Whenever we attempt to discuss the revelation God has made of His three Persons, we should do so with bowed heads and reverent hearts—for the ground we tread is ineffably holy. The subject is one of transcendent sacredness, for it concerns the infinitely majestic and glorious One. For the whole of our knowledge thereon, we are entirely shut up to what it has pleased God to reveal of Himself in His Oracles. Science, philosophy, experience, observation or speculation cannot—in this exalted sphere—increase our knowledge one iota. As one eminent theologian said, “The doctrine of three Persons in one God is wholly inconceivable by us, and Unitarians consider it as the greatest contradiction and absurdity imaginable. And those Trinitarians who have undertaken to *explain* it and make it more intelligible, have really made it ridiculous by darkening counsel by words without knowledge. The being of God, the mode of His subsisting, must be infinitely above our comprehension.”

The Divine Trinity is a Trinity in Unity: That is to say, there are not three Gods, but three Persons as co-existing by essential union in the Divine essence, as being the one true God. Those three Persons are co-equal and co-glorious so that one is not before or after the other, neither greater nor less than the other. It is in and by Their covenant offices that They are manifested unto us, and it is our privilege and duty to believe and know how these three Persons stand engaged to us and are interested in us by the everlasting covenant—but not so to understand the mystery of Their subsistence. Any teaching which does not equally honour all the Persons of the Godhead—distinctively and unitedly—is of no value to the soul. As one has said, “There is not a vestige of Christianity where the truth of the Trinity is not known and acknowledged. Not a vestige of godliness in the heart where the Father, Son and Spirit do not officially dwell. There is not a clear view of any doctrine of God’s grace to be obtained, unless (so to speak) the telescope of the truth of the Trinity be applied to the eye of faith, and that doctrine be viewed through it.”

In view of what has just been pointed out, it constitutes one of the gravest signs of the times that in professedly “Christian” countries, the Triune God is no longer officially acknowledged. While some of our national leaders still give thanks unto “God” and own our dependence upon “the Almighty,” yet that is no more than any orthodox Jew or Mohammedan would do. There is a studied avoidance of any reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit. Yet sad though that be, it is not to be wondered at; it is simply the shadowing forth in the civil realm of what has long obtained in the religious. For several generations past, the absolute Deity of Christ and of the Spirit has been openly denied in most of the theological seminaries; and thereby, the Tri-unity of God was repudiated. Even in most of the “orthodox churches,” the eternal Three have not been accorded Their rightful place—either in the doctrinal teaching of the pulpit, or the devotional life of the pew.

In the Benediction, the apostle invokes the Trinity as the Source of grace, love, and communion. Its unique features must not be overlooked: The order is unusual, and the Names used informal. The Son is placed before the Father. The Divine Persons are not here spoken of as the Son, the Father and the Spirit, but as the Lord Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is because what we have in our text is not primarily a confession of faith (as is Mat 28:19), nor a Doxology (as is Jud 24, 25), but a Benediction. A doxology is an ascription of praise; a benediction is a word of blessing: The one ascend from the heart of the saint unto God, the other descends from God to the saint. “Consequently the Benediction does

not approach the subject from the standpoint of theology, but of *experience*. It is not concerned with definition, nor does it contemplate the glory of God in the absoluteness of His Deity; but it sets Him forth as He is realised in the soul" (S. Chadwick, to whom we are also indebted for other thoughts and expressions in the previous article and this one).

The Christian Benediction, therefore, intimates that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of great importance to the existence and progress of vital godliness: That it is not a subject of mere speculation, but one on which depends all the communications of grace and peace to the saints. It is a striking and solemn fact that those who reject the truth of the Trinity are seldom known to even profess unto having spiritual communion with God; but instead, treat the same as a species of enthusiasm and fanaticism, as a perusal of the writings of "Unitarians" will show. The Benediction, then, sums up the blessings of Christian privilege in the three great words of the Gospel: Grace, love, communion. Those three Divine gifts are attributed to different Persons in the Trinity—for there is a distinction of functions, as well as of Persons, in the Godhead. Each takes precedence in His own peculiar work—though we cannot trace the limits of such, and must be careful, lest we conceive of God as three Gods rather than One. Each belongs to all. Grace is of God and of the Spirit, as well as of the Son. Love is of the Son and Spirit, as well as the Father. And our communion is with the Father and the Son, as well as with the Spirit.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." Why distinctively ascribe "grace" to *Him* if it be of God and the Spirit as well? Because in the economy of redemption, all grace comes to us through Him. The word "grace" is the special token of Paul in every epistle—eight close with "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," sometimes varying the formula to "with your spirit." It is one of the outstanding words of the Gospel. "It is more than mercy and greater than love. Justice demands integrity, and mercy is the ministry of pity; love seeks correspondence, appreciation and response; but grace demands no merit. Grace flows unrestrained and unreserved upon those who have no goodness to plead and no claim to advance. Grace seeks the unfit and the unworthy. It is love, mercy and compassion combined, stretching out towards the guilty, ungracious and rebellious. It is the only hope for sinful men. If salvation comes not by grace, it can never be ours. Without grace there can be no reconciliation, no pardon, no peace" (S. Chadwick).

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." That is His designation as the God-man Mediator. It includes and indicates His Divine nature: He is "the Lord," yea, "The Lord of lords;" His human nature: He is "Jesus;" His office: He is "Christ," the anointed One, the long-promised Messiah, the Mediator. It is the favour of His Divine Person clothed with our nature and made the Head of His people—which the apostle invokes for all his believing brethren. *His* "grace" be with you all. That comes first in the Benediction, because it is our initial need. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2Co 8:9): There, it is His infinite condescension in submitting to such a mean condition for our sakes.

When He became incarnate, the Only-begotten of the Father was beheld by His own as "full of grace and truth" (Joh 1:14), and as the apostle added, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). Here, the meaning of "grace" passes from an attribute of the Divine character to an active energy in the souls of the redeemed. At the Throne of Grace, we "find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). The heart is "established with grace" (Heb 13:9), and by that grace, we are enabled to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb 12:28). It is in "the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2Ti 2:1) that we find our strength, and He assures us of its competency to support us under all afflictions and persecutions by the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2Co 12:9). Therefore, we are exhorted to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). Those passages all speak of the Divine power in the soul as the operation of "grace;" and in each one, it is connected with the Lord Jesus Christ as its Fountain.

"And the love of God." There are two reasons why this comes second—because this is the order, both in the economy of redemption and in Christian experience. First, it was the mediatorial grace or work of Christ which procured the love of God unto His people—which turned away His wrath from them and reconciled Him to them. Hence, it is referred to not as "the love of the Father"—which never changed or diminished unto His people—but as the love or good will of God, considered as their Governor and Judge. Second, it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in saving us that we are brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of the love of God. The love of the Father is indeed the source and originating cause of redemption, but that is not the particular love of God which is here in view. The death of Christ as a satisfaction for our sins was necessary in order to bring us to God and the participation of His love. The manifestation of

the love of God toward us in the pardon of our sins and the justification of our persons was conditioned on the atoning blood.

“And the communion of the Holy Ghost.” As the grand design of Christ’s work Godward was to appease His judicial wrath and procure for us His love and favour, so the grand effect saintwards was to procure for them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word may be rendered either “communion” or “communication.” It is by the communication of the Holy Spirit that we are regenerated, that faith is given, that holiness is wrought in us. Life, light, love and liberty are the special benefits He bestows upon us. Without the Spirit being communicated to us, we could never enter—personally and experimentally—into the benefits of Christ’s mediation. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13, 14). Thus, the communicating of the Spirit to His people was one of the chief objects of Christ’s death.

But the Greek also signifies the *communion* of the Holy Spirit, a word which means partnership and companionship—He sharing with us the things of God. Grace tends to love, and love to communion. Hence, we see again that the order here is that of Christian experience. It is only as grace is consciously received, and the love of God is realised in the soul, that there can be any intelligent and real communion. Through Christ to God; and through Both, to the abiding presence of the Comforter. This expression, “the communion of the Holy Ghost,” shows He is a Person—for it is meaningless to talk of “communion” with an impersonal principle or influence. United as He is in this verse with “the Lord Jesus Christ and God,” it evidences Him to be a Divine Person. Further, it denotes He is an Object of intercourse and converse; and hence, we must be on our guard against grieving Him (Eph 4:30). The separate mention of each of the Eternal Three teaches us that They are to be accorded equal honour, glory, and praise from us.

What is signified by, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be with you all*” (2Co 13:14)? It cannot mean less than a consciousness of God’s Presence. The apostle was not praying for the gifts of grace, love and communion, apart from the Persons in whom alone they are to be found. It was a request that the presence of the Triune God might be realised in the souls of His people. The N.T. teaches that the Divine Three are equally present in the heart of the believer. Speaking of the Spirit, Christ said, “he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Joh 14:17), and of Himself and Father, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). The Christian is indwelt by the Triune God: The Lord Jesus dwells in him as the source of all grace, God abides in him as the spring of all love, and the Holy Spirit communes with him and energises him for all spiritual service.

What is the *purpose* of that indwelling? God abides in the believer to conform him to His image, that he may become one with Him—one with Him in mind and heart, in character and purpose. The Christian reflects his God. The grace by which the Lord Jesus tasted death for His people is designed to produce a like spirit of sacrifice in them, “because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1Jo 3:16). They that know the love of God must live the life of love. If we say the love of God is “in us” and we walk contrary to love, we are liars (1Jo 4:20). The God of love dwells in His people that they may live the life of Godlike love. So it is with the communion of the Holy Spirit: He does not share with us His riches that we may spend them upon ourselves. “The threefold Benediction is to abide with us that its threefold grace may be manifested by us, and the presence of the three-one God demonstrated through us” (S. Chadwick).

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

25. Fifteenth Miracle – Part 3

For the benefit of new readers and also to refresh the memories of old ones, we will briefly review our last two articles upon this miracle. First, we emphasised its *reality*, seeking to show it was indeed a miracle which took place and that it might justly be regarded as connected with our prophet. Second, we dwelt upon its *occasion*, which was the fearful shortage of food in the city of Samaria, resulting from its being so closely invested by the Syrians that none of its inhabitants could go forth and obtain fresh supplies (2Ki 6:24, 25). So acute did conditions become that the vilest of offals were sold at exorbitant prices, and mothers had begun to consume their own babies. So far from humbling himself beneath the hand of Divine judgment and acknowledging that it was his own idolatry and impenitence which was the procuring cause of reducing his kingdom to such sore straits, Israel's king turned an evil eye upon Elisha and determined to make a scapegoat of him, taking a horrible oath that he should be slain forthwith (2Ki 6:31)—evidencing that he was a true son of Jezebel (1Ki 18:4).

“But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him” (2Ki 6:32): Quiet from fear of evil, he calmly awaited events. Announcing that “this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head,” he gave orders that the door should be shut and the royal messenger be not admitted, with Jehoram himself hastening on just behind. The prophet and the king then came face to face; and third, the former *announced* the impending miracle. “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD: Thus saith the LORD; To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold [as cheaply as] for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria” (2Ki 7:1). That was tantamount to saying, God in His high sovereignty is going to show mercy on your wretched kingdom, and within a day, will work a miracle that shall entirely reverse the present situation, so that not only will the Syrians depart, but there shall be provided an abundant supply of food, which will fully meet the needs of your people; and that, without a blow being struck, or your royal coffers being any the poorer.

“Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” (2Ki 7:2). Such a message of good news as the prophet had just proclaimed of deliverance from the enemy and food for the starving, seemed utterly incredible to carnal reason; and therefore, instead of being received with fervent thanksgiving, it met with nought but a contemptuous sneer. Unbelief presumed to call into question the Divine promise. Arguing from what he could *see*, no possible relief being visible, this wicked lord scorned the likelihood of its fulfilment. That which Elisha had announced was indeed impossible to anyone but the living God, for only by a miracle could it be made good; yet, it was the express word of Him that cannot lie and Who is endowed with omnipotence. Despite the effort of his unbelieving courtier to prevent any weakening of his resolution, the king of Israel decided to wait another day ere carrying out his murderous design, and during that interval, the prediction was accomplished.

We turn now to consider, fourth, *its heralds*, or the ones made use of by the Lord to proclaim the wonder of mercy which He had wrought. Strange indeed do the Divine methods often appear to our dim vision—yet in the light of Scripture, their significance is not lost upon those favoured with anointed eyes. It was not “the elders of Israel” who had sat with Elisha in his house, nor was it “the sons of the prophets” whom the Lord honoured on this occasion. God is sovereign and employs whom He pleases. Often He acts as He does in order to stain the pride of man, for He is jealous of His own honour and will suffer no flesh to glory in His presence. It is true that He has called certain men to the special work of the ministry and set them apart thereto, and that He frequently works through them in the converting of His people; yet, He is by no means tied to that particular agency, and often manifests His independency by making use of the most unlikely ones to be His agents—as appears in the more extreme cases of Balaam and Judas. So it was here.

“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?” (2Ki 7:3). More unlikely instruments could scarcely be imagined. They were pariahs, outcasts, debarred from mingling with their ordinary fellows. They were lepers, and as such, excluded by the Divine Law (Lev 13:44-46). Yet *these* were the ones whom God was pleased to employ. How dif-

ferent are His thoughts and ways from man's! But let us observe the position which they occupied and the strange anomaly which that reveals. They were sitting "at the entering in of the gate"—that is, of "Samaria" (2Ki 7:1); namely, on the *outside* of the city's walls—as the next verse shows. There, we have a striking sidelight on the inconsistency of perverse human nature, especially in connection with religious matters. Though an idolater and devoid of any respect for Jehovah—yet Jehoram and his officers were punctilious in carrying out the requirement of the ceremonial law as it respected the exclusion of lepers! They were diligent in tithing mint and anise, while omitting the weightier matters of the moral law (Mat 23:23).

That to which we have called attention is frequently exemplified on the pages of Holy Writ. Instead of utterly destroying Amalek and all his possessions, as commanded, when God delivered them into his hands, Saul permitted the people to spare the best of the sheep and oxen that they might offer them in "sacrifice unto the LORD" (1Sa 15:15, 21). To whom Samuel declared, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1Sa 15:22). Because it was the eve of the Passover, the Jews besought Pilate that the bodies of Christ and the two thieves who had been crucified with Him "might be taken away" (Joh 19:31), that their solemn feast might not be defiled. What a strange mixture human nature is! Those ceremonially unclean lepers must be shut out of Samaria, even though Jehovah Himself was treated with the utmost contempt! And do we not see the same principle illustrated in Christendom? Let the papist attend early morning mass, and he may spend the remainder of "Sunday" as he pleases. Being a stickler for a particular form of baptism, breaking bread each Lord's Day morning, or spending five days at a "communion" is a mockery, if we love not our neighbour as ourselves.

"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" (2Ki 7:3). It will probably surprise many to hear that some of our readers have been taught that this is the proper attitude to assume when one has been convicted of his lost condition—appeal being made to such passages as, "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors" (Pro 8:34). "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water" (Joh 5:3). The awakened sinner is told that he is utterly helpless to do anything for himself, entirely dependent on God's sovereign pleasure, and that since there is a "set time" to favour Zion (Psa 102:13), he must meekly wait for God's appointed hour of deliverance—should He design to deliver him. But such counsel is an utter *misuse* of both the truth of God's sovereignty and of man's spiritual inability, and proof that it *is* so is found in the fact that it both clashes with the call of the Gospel and is a repudiation of human responsibility.

The truth is that the spiritual inability of the natural man is both a voluntary and a criminal one: He does not love and serve God because he hates Him, he believes not the Gospel because he prefers to cherish a lie, he will not come to the Light because he loves darkness. So far from his, "I *cannot* repent, I *cannot* believe," expressing an honest desire so to do, it is but an avowal of the heart's enmity against God. If the doctrine of the Cross and the glorious message of the Gospel contain nothing to overcome such enmity and attract the soul to Christ, it is not for us to invent *another* Gospel and bend the Scriptures to the inclination of man's depravity. It is we who must bend to the Scriptures, and if we do not, it will be to our eternal undoing. The one who wrings his hands over his inability to believe and asks, "What can I do?" is not to be soothed by something *other* than the Gospel of Christ, or encouraged to suppose that he is willing to be saved in God's way. Yet *that* is the very delusion such souls cherish, imagining they are as willing to be saved from their sins, as the impotent man by the pool was desirous of being made whole.

Neither Christ, nor any of His apostles, ever told a convicted soul to passively wait for God's appointed hour of deliverance. Instead, He bade the heavy laden, "come unto me" (Mat 11:28); and so far from informing those who followed Him across the sea, that it lies not in their power to do anything to secure the Bread of life, He exhorted them to "Labour...for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Joh 6:27). Rather than tell men they must sit quietly before it, Christ commanded, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luk 13:24). When his hearers were pricked in their hearts and asked, "What shall we do?" instead of saying, "You can do nothing, except wait until God speaks peace unto you," Peter bade them "Repent" (Act 2:37, 38). Those who think they have been given a sense of their helplessness are quite content if some physician of no value will inspire them with a hope in the way they are now in and encourage them to expect that if they remain passive, God will release them by a "moving of the waters." We do but miserably deceive souls if we give them any comfort or hold out any hope for them, while they remain impenitent and away from Christ.

It is recorded that the passengers of a ship off South America went ashore on a brief expedition, ascending one of the mountains. But ere they were aware, night came on and a very cold fog. They felt a strong inclination to sleep, but a medical man in the party remonstrated against any such indulgence, warning them that there would be the utmost danger of their never waking. As the one who chronicled this incident asks, "What had been thought of his conduct if, instead of urging his companions to escape from the mount, he had indulged them in their wishes? The Scriptures declare, 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him' (Joh 3:36)—and surely, we ought not to contradict that, either by directing to the use of means short of 'believing' or by encouraging those who use them to hope for a happy issue." Paul did not offer the jailor comfort on the ground of his being in great distress, but bade him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 16:31). The word to exercised souls is not "sit still"—but "seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Mat 7:7; Luk 11:9).

But to return to the narrative. "They said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2Ki 7:3, 4). How those poor lepers put to shame the "do-nothing" Fatalists! Those men rightly recognised the hopelessness of their case, perceiving that continued passivity would profit them nothing; and hence, they decided to act. And if you, my reader, are already convicted of your perishing condition, do not rest content with that conviction and persuade yourself that in due time, God will save you—but embrace the Gospel offer and receive Christ as your Lord and Saviour, for He has declared, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37).

We ask the indulgence of others who have not been infected with such paralysing teaching while we add a further word, yea, we would ask them to beg God to use these paragraphs to deliver some souls from this subtle snare of the Devil. If one who reads these lines has been made to feel his lost condition, then consider, we pray you, the far happier situation facing *you* from that in which those lepers were. They decided to come unto an enemy and cast themselves upon his mercy, while you are invited to betake yourself unto the Friend of publicans and sinners! They had no invitation from the Syrians, but you *have* from the Lord: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Joh 7:37). They had nothing better than an "if they save us alive" to venture upon—whereas you have "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou *shalt* be saved" (Act 16:31). They were confronted with the possible alternative of being killed; not so you: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (Joh 3:36)—then why hesitate?

"And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there" (2Ki 7:5). What was before us in verses 3 and 4 did not end in idle talk. The situation for those lepers was a desperate one, and prompted by a sense of urgency, they acted. Their sitting still had got them nowhere, so they "rose up" and proceeded at once to their proposed objective. They did not puzzle their heads about God's secret decree and whether or not His ordained hour had arrived—for that was none of their business. Instead, they responded to the instinct of self-preservation. Again we say, how far superior is the sinner's case: He need not wait a moment for the prompting of any instinct, but is invited "*Come*, for all things are *now* ready" (Luk 14:17). Come just as you are with all your sinfulness and unworthiness, and if you cannot come to Christ *with* a melted heart and faith, then come to Him as a desperate patient *for* them.

The Divine narrative breaks in upon the account of the heralds of this miracle to show us, fifth, *its means*—for before we see those lepers going forth to publish their good news, we are first informed how it was that they came to find the camp empty. "For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us" (2Ki 7:6). This is to be regarded as the sequel to 2 Kings 6:24: Benhadad's purpose was to starve out Samaria. But man proposes, and God opposes and disposes. "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect" (Psa 33:10).

The Lord accomplishes His purpose by a great variety of measures and methods: Sometimes employing the supernatural, more often using the natural. What were the means He used here? In the light of what is *not* said in verse 6, it seems strange that T. Scott should write, "The infatuation which seized the minds of the whole Syrian army was equal to the illusion put upon their senses, and both were from the Lord, but how produced we know not." Little better is M. Henry's "these had their hearing imposed upon." There

was neither illusion, nor imposition. It does not say, “The Lord made them to hear a noise *like as of* chariots and horses,” but the actual thing itself—that is to say, He so attuned their auditory nerves that they registered the sound of what previously was inaudible to them. This is but another instance of how we create our own difficulties when reading the Word through failing to attend closely unto exactly what *is* said.

If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we should have no difficulty in ascertaining the precise means used on this occasion. On a previous one, God had employed “horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2Ki 6:17), and as we showed, the reference there was to angelic beings. Then why not the same here! There, God “opened the eyes of the young man” in order to see them; here, He opened the ears of the Syrians to hear them. It may well be that in their original condition, our first parents were capacitated to both see and hear celestial beings, but the fall impaired those as well as all their faculties—the “clairvoyance” and “clairaudience” of Spiritist mediums being the devil’s imitation of man’s original powers. That the Syrians—unregenerate idolaters—misinterpreted what they heard, is only to be expected, as those who heard the Father speaking to His Son said, “it thundered” (Joh 12:29); and as those who accompanied Saul heard the Voice which spake to him (Act 9:7), but “heard not the voice” (Act 22:9)—distinguished not the words.

“Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life” (2Ki 7:7). How true it is that “the wicked flee when no man pursueth” (Pro 28:1)! Supposing that a more formidable force had come to the relief of the besieged Samaritans, the Syrians were filled with consternation; and at once, abandoned their well-provisioned camp. So thoroughly panic-stricken were they, that they left their “horses” which had accelerated their flight. How easily can the Lord make the heart of the stoutest to quake, and how vain and mad a thing it is for thee to defy Him! “Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it” (Eze 22:14). Then throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and make your peace with Him now.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

7. *Its Stages*

For the benefit of new readers, it should be pointed out that in our last article, we called attention to the fact that Christians may be graded into three classes according to their “stature” in Christ or their spiritual development and progress. In proof thereof, appeal was made to Mark 4:28 and 1 John 2:13. In addition to those passages, we may also take note of our Lord’s parable of the Wheat, wherein He represented the good-ground hearers as bringing forth fruit in varying degrees or quantities. That parable is recorded in each of the first three Gospels; and there is, among others, this noticeable difference between their several statements: That Mark says of those who received the Word, they “bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred” (Mar 4:20); whereas, in Matthew’s account, that order is reversed—“bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Mat 13:23). Evidently, the same parable was uttered by our Lord on different occasions, and He did not employ precisely the same language—the Holy Spirit guiding each Evangelist according to His particular design in that Gospel.

Since Matthew is the opening book of the N.T., it is obviously the connecting link between it and the Old; and accordingly, the nature of its contents differ considerably from that of the three which follow. The prophetic element is far more prominent, and its dispensational character more marked. Many have regarded the parables of Matthew 13 as supplying prophetic outline of the history of Christendom. Personally, we still believe that view—that instead of its course being steadily upwards, it was to be definitely downwards; and that, so far from the Gospel converting the world to Christ, this age would witness the whole public testimony of God being corrupted. Thus, we regard the “hundredfold” of Matthew 13:23 as being descriptive of the primitive prosperity of Christianity in the days of the apostles, the “sixty” of the noticeable and lesser yield during the times of the Reformers and Puritans, and the “thirty” as that which resulted from the labours of men like Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and later, Spurgeon; while today, nothing is left but the mere *gleanings* of the harvest. Thus, the course of this Christian dispensation has been very similar to that of the Mosaical—with its reformations in the days of David and then of Ezra—but ending like Malachi shows!

But in Mark 4:20, it is not the corporate testimony which is in view, but the spiritual experience of individual believers: “And bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred,” which corresponds with the three grades of verse 28—“first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,” and the apostle’s more definite description—“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children [babes], because ye have known the Father” (1Jo 2:13). As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679) pointed out: John “had an advantage over all his fellow apostles in that he lived the longest of them, so that in the course of his life, he went through the several ages or seasons that Christians do, and having also had an experience of other Christians and what was eminently in and proper unto each age of men in Christ, writes unto all sorts accordingly and sets down what things spiritual belonged into those several stages.”

In our last, we dwelt upon some of the features which characterise the “babes” or “little children,” pointing out that those very designations intimate that which distinguishes them from the “young men” and “fathers”—for God has made the natural to shadow forth the spiritual. “Brethren, be not children in understanding” (1Co 14:20). As in a young child, reason is undeveloped, so in a spiritual babe, there is but a feeble apprehension of the deeper things of God; yet as that exhortation shows, the believer ought soon to pass out of a state of infancy. What is said of them in 1 John 2:13 describes another mark: “Ye have known the Father.” Little children acknowledge their parents, are dear to them, hang about them, cannot endure to be long absent from them. They expect to be much noticed and fondled; and accordingly, it is said of the good Shepherd, “He shall gather the *lambs* with his arm, and carry them in his bosom” (Isa 40:11). Little ones must be dandled on the knees, cannot endure the frowns of a father, and are not yet strong enough for conflicts—and hence, God tempers His providential dealings with them accordingly. The babe has “tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1Pe 2:3); but as yet, knows not of the “fulness” there is in Him.

Now the young convert is not to remain a spiritual babe, but is bidden to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18); yea, to “grow up into him in *all* things” (Eph 4:15). God has made full provision for him to do so; and by his availing himself of that provision is He honoured and glorified. But the sad fact is that many Christians never do so; and many others who “run well” (Gal 5:7) for a while, lapse back again into spiritual infancy. We are warned against this very danger by the solemn example of the Hebrews, to whom the apostle had to write, “Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (Heb 5:11-13).

Three things marked those believers who had failed to advance in the school of Christ. First, they were “dull of hearing” (Heb 5:11)—which connotes not slow wittedness, but failure of affection and will to respond to the teaching they had received. They were unconcerned about what they heard, unsearched by it, and consequently, it affected no change for the better in their characters and conduct. In Scripture, to “hear” God means to *heed* Him, to bring our ways and works into accord with His revealed will. God’s Word is given to us as a Rule to walk by (Psa 119:105), and walking signifies to go forward in the highway of holiness. Thus, to be “dull of hearing” is a species of self-will, it is a non-response to the call of God, it is to disregard His precepts. As intelligence begins to dawn, the first thing required of a little child should be subjection to the will of those who have its best interests at heart; and the first thing required by the Father of His children is loving obedience to Him.

Spiritual babes need to be taught “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12). What were the “first principles” which God taught Adam and Eve in Eden? Why, that He was their Maker and required obedience from them. What were the “first principles” inculcated by Jehovah at Sinai? Why, that Israel must be in dutiful subjection unto the One who had redeemed them from Egypt. What were the “first principles” enunciated by Christ in His initial public address? His sermon on the mount must answer. The “first principles” of spirituality or genuine piety are personal faith in God and loving obedience to Him. While *they* be in operation, the soul will prosper and make progress; as soon as they become inoperative, we deteriorate. Hence, the second thing complained of is, the Hebrews were “unskilful [margin “inexperienced”] in the word of righteousness” (Heb 5:13). Observe the particular title by which the Word is here called—that which emphasises the *practical* side of things: they were not walking in “the paths of righteousness” (Psa 23:3). They had degenerated into self-pleasers, following the by-ways of self-will.

Third, they were incapable of receiving “strong meat.” The force of which may be gathered from verses 10 and 11. The apostle desired to open unto the Hebrews the mystery of “Melchizedek” and bring before them deeper teaching concerning the official glories of Christ, but their state cramped him. He must suit his instruction according to the condition of their hearts, as it was evidenced by their walk. He was similarly restrained by the case of the Corinthians: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto [because of their perversity and naughtiness] ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1Co 3:1, 2 and see Mark 4:33). “Milk” is a figurative expression denoting precisely the same thing as “first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12)—faith, obedience. As it would be senseless to teach a child grammar before it learned the alphabet, or arithmetic before it knew the values of the numerals, so it is useless to teach Christians the higher mysteries of the Faith or to take an excursion into the realm of prophecy, when they have not learned to be regulated by the practical teaching of Scripture.

Here, then, are two of the chief reasons why so few Christians really advance beyond spiritual babyhood to become “young men” that are “strong” and who “overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:13, 14). Here are the worms which, it is to be feared, have been eating at the root of the spiritual life of some of our readers. Because they were “dull [not of intellect, but of] hearing.” The Greek word for “dull” is rendered “slothful” in Hebrews 6:12. It denotes a state of slackness and inertia. It means they were too indolent to bestir themselves. They were spiritual sluggards. They were not willing to “buy the truth” (Pro 23:23) and make it their own by incorporating it in their daily lives. They failed to “gird up the loins” (1Pe 1:13) of their minds, and earnestly and resolutely set about the task God has appointed them—namely, to deny self and take up their Cross daily and follow Christ. They did not lay to heart the *precepts* of the Gospel and translate them into practice. They made no progress in practical godliness.

Second, lack of progress was due to their being “unskilful in the word of righteousness” (Heb 5:13). The word “righteousness” means right doing, up to the required standard. God’s Word is the alone Rule of righteousness, the Standard by which all our motives and actions are to be measured, the Rule by which they are to be regulated. That Word is to *govern us* both inwardly and outwardly. By that Word of Righteousness, each of us will be judged in the Day to come. Now, it is not said that those Hebrews were ignorant of this Word, but “unskilful in” it. The word “unskilful” here means inexperienced; that is, inexperienced in the practical *use* they made of it. I may be thoroughly familiar with its letter, understand much of its literal meaning, able to quote correctly scores of its verses; yet, so far from that serving any good purpose, it will only add to my condemnation if I am not *controlled* by it. To be “unskilful in the word of righteousness” means I have not yet learned how to mortify the flesh, overcome temptations, resist the Devil; and as long as that be the case, if I be saved at all, I am only a spiritual infant, undeveloped in the spiritual life.

Another thing which holds back many a young convert from spiritual progress is his making too much of his initial experience. Unless he be on his guard, there is great danger of making an idol of the peace and joy which comes from the knowledge of sins forgiven. God requires us to walk by faith and not by feelings, for though the latter may for a while please us, the former is that which honours *Him*, and the faith which most honours *Him* is that which rests on His bare Word when there are no feelings to buoy us up. Moreover, God is a jealous God and will not long suffer us to esteem His gifts more highly than Himself. If we are more occupied with lively frames and inward comforts than we are with God in Christ, then He will take from us a sense of His comforts, and the soul will sink and be cast down under a sense of the loss of them. In such a case, Revelation 2:5 prescribes the remedy: The sin of idolatry must be penitently confessed, and we must return to the Storehouse of grace as a beggar, and make Christ our all.

Many babes in Christ have their spiritual growth retarded by (negatively) the lack of suitable instruction, and (positively) by the cold water poured on their joy and ardour by their elders. It is neither necessary, nor kind, for some would-be wiseacres to tell them, “This joy of yours will not last long—your night sky will soon be overcast with dark clouds.” Many of them are likely to discover that soon enough for themselves, while others may live to disprove such doleful predictions. This writer was often told that he would quickly lose his assurance of God’s acceptance of him in Christ, but though more than thirty-five years have passed since sovereign grace “plucked [him] out of the fire” (Zec 3:2), his assurance has never wavered or weakened, for it has always rested on the unchanging Word of Him that cannot lie. Others are greatly stumbled by empty professors and the inconsistencies of some real Christians, and they allow that to keep them from striving after a closer walk with God.

Many are kept weak in faith through failure to attain unto a proper acquaintance with the person and work of Christ. They do not realise how sufficient and able He was for everything He undertook to do for them, and how perfectly He finished the same. They have no clear views of either the fulness or the freeness of His so-great salvation. Consequently, a legal spirit working with their unbelief puts them upon reasoning against their being saved freely by grace through faith. Those unbelieving reasonings gain great power from their defeats in their warfare between the spirit and the flesh, or grace and nature. They hearken to and trust more in the reports of self than to the testimony of God’s Word. Thereby, their faith is checked in its growth, and they remain but babes in Christ. Their weak faith receives but little from Christ, and it continues weak because they have so little dependence upon the fulness of grace there is in Him for sinners. They appropriate not His promises, nor trust in His faithfulness and power. Growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ are inseparable, and experimental knowledge of Christ is entirely dependent upon the exercise of *faith on Him*.

But we must pass on now to the second class. “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:14). Although the classification which this passage makes of the Lord’s people does not regard them simply according to their natural ages, but rather to the several degrees of stature in Christ; yet the characters given them are more or less taken from and assimilated unto what prominently distinguishes each class in their natural life. Infants rejoice in the sight of their parents and in prattling to them—thus, the spiritual babes are said to “know the Father.” Proverbs 20:29 tells us, “The glory of young men is their strength”—and accordingly, those who reach the second stage of Christian development are termed “young men,” and it is said of them, “ye are strong.” Young men are renowned for their athletic vigour and are the ones called upon to fight in

the defence of their country; and here, they are pictured as victorious in conflict as having “overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:13, 14).

“I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:14). Though these words were most certainly not written by the apostle in order to flatter, but were beyond doubt, a sober statement of fact concerning those he addressed; yet, because of our dulness of understanding, they are by no means free of difficulty to us. Therefore, as the Lord is pleased to enable, we shall endeavour to supply answer to the following questions. Wherein do the “young men” differ from the “babes”? In what sense can they be said to be “strong”?—is there such a thing as out-growing spiritual weakness! Exactly what is signified by “the word of God abideth in you”—and are those words to be understood as explaining the preceding clause, or the one which follows? In view of the many defeats, which apparently all Christians experience, what is meant by “ye have overcome the wicked one”?

Wherein do “young men” differ from “babes”? First, because having been longer engaged in the practice of godliness, they have learned to more seriously consider their ways, in order that they may avoid sin and the occasions thereof. They have sufficiently acquainted themselves with God as to realise the need of watching, praying, striving both against inward corruptions and outward temptations. They frequently present before the Throne of Grace such petitions as these: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness” (Psa 119:33-36). Sins, which formerly they regarded as blotted out by the general pardon received at conversion, are now thought of with shame and bitterness.

Second, they are more diligent in the use of means. Not that they necessarily devote more time thereto, but that they are more conscientious and spiritually exercised therein. As they have become increasingly acquainted with their corrupt inclinations, rebellious wills, the workings of unbelief and pride, they attend more closely to that basic duty, “Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23); and accordingly, they can truthfully say, “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (Psa 119:112)—though they will often have to confess lack of power to perform their desire. That makes them the more concerned to learn how to make use of their spiritual “armour”—for none so conscious of its need and so earnest to put it on as *this* grade of believers.

Third, they are better versed in the Word of God. Though not so experienced and proficient in the Word of Righteousness as the “fathers,” yet they are not as unskilful as the “babes.” They have learned much in how to personally appropriate the Scriptures, how to apply them to their several cases, circumstances and needs. They long to make further progress in piety; and therefore, they meditate in the Law of God day and night. Deeply exercised that their daily lives may be pleasing to God and adorning to the profession which they make, they are concerned to inquire, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (Psa 119:9); and discover the answer to be, “by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9). Thus, they are daily furnishing themselves with spiritual knowledge and fortifying themselves against their enemies.

Fourth, they have learned to look more outside of self. They neither make so much of inward comforts, nor do they lean so much unto their own understanding as once they did. They look more to Christ and live more upon Him. As formerly they trusted Him for cleansing and righteousness, now they turn to Him for wisdom and strength. They have discovered from experience that these can only be drawn from Him by the exercise of *faith*. They have realised themselves to be poor, helpless creatures, continually in need, and as having no means of their own to supply them. Thereby, the Lord teaches them to live more *out of* themselves and more upon His fulness. When the Enemy cometh in like a flood, they look to Christ for victory. When conscious of their impotency, they do not give way to despair, but trust Christ to renew their strength. Thus, by such means, they pass from the weakness of infancy and become “young men.”

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

6. *Its Effectuation*

For the benefit of new readers and to refresh the memories of last year's ones, we will here epitomize what has been presented in previous articles. First, we pointed out the *distinctions* which require to be recognised if confusion is to be avoided. (1) That in connection with reconciliation, God acts both as a loving Father and as an inflexible Judge. (2) That His elect are viewed both in the purpose of His grace and under the condemnation of His Law. (3) That they are viewed by Him both in Christ as their covenant-Head and as the depraved descendants of fallen Adam: In the one case, as His "dear children" (Eph 5:1); and in the other, as being "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). (4) That though there be no change in God, yet there is in His attitude unto and His dealings with them. (5) That God's purpose concerning His elect in eternity and the actual accomplishment of that purpose in a time-state must not be confused. Failure to observe these distinctions has caused many to err in their preaching and writing on this important subject.

Next, we demonstrated the *need for* reconciliation. Therein, we dwelt upon the fearful breach, which the entrance of sin made between God and man, the creature casting off all allegiance to his Maker, revolting from his rightful Lord, despising His authority, trampling under foot His commandments. We showed that while the original offence was committed by Adam, yet he was acting as the federal head of his race; and that, therefore, the guilt and consequences of his transgression are justly imputed to all his descendants. Moreover, they take sides with him by perpetuating his evil course. The life of the unregenerate is one unbroken course of rebellion against God. The consequences of that breach are that fallen man is separated from God, he is an object of abhorrence to God, he is under the wrath of God, he is in bondage to Satan, and so under the reigning power of sin that he hates God. Obviously, such an one is in urgent need of being restored to His favour and having his vile enmity removed.

Then we saw that *the Author* of reconciliation is God, and more particularly, God the Father. In the development of which we pointed out that the recovery of His fallen elect proceeds from the good pleasure of His will, or "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11). That gracious design was suggested by none other, and no external motive influenced Him. No necessity was put upon Him to form such a resolution: It was simply His own sovereign design—"I will shew mercy" (Exo 33:19). Yet, it was His own nature which prompted that decision; it originated in the everlasting *love*, which God bore to His elect—a love so great that even their awful sins could not quench, nor produce any change in it. Nevertheless, since the Divine holiness was infinitely antagonised by sin, Divine justice required that full satisfaction should be made for the dishonour it had wrought. Nought but Divine *wisdom* could find a way in which Love and Law were perfectly harmonized, and solve the problem of how mercy and justice might alike maintain its ground without the slightest compromise, yea, issue from the conflict honourable and glorious.

Under the last division of our subject, we turned our attention to the Divine *arrangement* for the accomplishment of reconciliation—namely, "The Everlasting Covenant," in which is displayed the Divine perfections in their blessed unity. In that covenant, God gave His elect to Christ as a trust or charge, holding Him responsible for their everlasting felicity. In that covenant, all the details of the wondrous plan of redemption were drawn up and settled. In that covenant, the Father made known unto the Son the terms which He must fulfil, and the task He must perform, in order to the saving of "that which was lost;" while the Son voluntarily concurred therein and gladly consented to carry out its stipulations. In that covenant, we have revealed the office which Christ was to assume and the nature of the work He was to do—namely, to serve as the Substitute and Surety of His people in the full discharge of all their obligations unto the Divine Law. In that covenant, the Father gave assurance of rendering adequate assistance to the Mediator in the performing of His engagement and the guarantee of the glorious reward upon the successful completion thereof.

We are now to see how the eternal purpose of God was effected, *how* the mutual engagements of the everlasting covenant were fulfilled. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption [or "status"] of sons" (Gal 4:4, 5). The "fulness of the time" means more than that the ordained hour had arrived: It signifies when all the preliminary operations of Divine providence had been completed, when the stage was thoroughly prepared for this unparalleled event, when the world's need had been fully

demonstrated. The advent of God's Son to this earth was no isolated event, but the climax of a lengthy preparation. That He was now "made of a woman" was the fulfillment of the Divine announcement in Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14. That He was "made under the law" (Gal 4:4), which His people had broken is what supplies the key to that which is otherwise an inexplicable mystery; in fact, throws a flood of light upon the experiences through which He passed from Bethlehem to Calvary.

The very circumstances of Christ's birth at once made unmistakably manifest that God had sent forth none other than His own Son and clearly intimated the unique mission upon which the Beloved of the Father had then entered. Nothing less than a supernatural birth befitted so august a Person, and such was accomplished by the miraculous conception of His virgin mother, by means of which a "holy" humanity became His (Luk 1:35)—a real human spirit, and soul, and body—yet, without the slightest taint of our corruption. The amazing event of the Incarnation and the Divine dignity of the One who had become flesh was signalled by the appearing again of "the Shekinah" (which had left Israel in the days of Ezekiel—Ezekiel 10:4, 18; 11:23), for "the glory of the Lord (namely, the Shekinah) shone round about" the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains, so that they were "sore afraid;" and an angel announced to them that the One just born was none other than "Christ the Lord;" while suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the "heavenly host" praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luk 2:9-14).

But, if what we have just alluded to were clear proofs that God had indeed "sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Gal 4:4), there were other attendant circumstances, which no less plainly intimated (to an anointed eye) that His Son was also "made under the law" and that—as the Surety of His people, as the One who had entered their Law-place—*He* must receive what is due *them*. This has not been sufficiently recognised. In that same second of Luke, we read that Mary "brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luk 2:7). The force of that is better perceived if it be linked with, "So he drove out the man" (Gen 3:24) from Eden, for he had become an outcast from his Maker. Do we not behold, then, in His exclusion from the inn and birth in a cattle shed, a definite shadowing forth of the fact that Christ had vicariously entered the place of His outcast people! In the circumcising of Him on the eighth day (Luk 2:21), there was an evident pre-figuration that He had been made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3). That was unspeakably solemn, but amazingly wonderful.

A little later, it was made evident that the One cradled in the manger was more than human. The wise men saw "*his* star in the east" (Mat 2:2) and came to Jerusalem enquiring, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" That extraordinary star "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Mat 2:9). Entering the house where He abode, they "fell down, and worshipped him" (Mat 2:11), presenting gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—thus were Divine honours paid Him. Yet, immediately after a determined effort was made by Herod to slay Him, as though to show us from the beginning that *His life was forfeit* and that a death by violence awaited Him! But His hour had not then arrived and Joseph was warned to flee with Him. His sojourn in Egypt was not without significance, for it intimated that as the Surety of His people, He had taken His place alongside of them in the typical house of bondage. With what awe and astonishment should we contemplate these things!

What we have sought to point out unmistakably opens up to us the deeper meaning of much that is recorded in the Gospels, supplying the key to the strange mingling of the lights and shadows in the earthly career of our Lord. That key lies in the distinction which must ever be drawn between the adorable Person and the awful place which He took, between the Son of God incarnate and the *office* He was discharging. Though His essential glory was veiled by flesh, yet that glory frequently broke forth in splendour. Or to put it in another way: God had suffered His Beloved to make "himself of no reputation" (Phi 2:7) in this world, yet He was so jealous of His honour that, again and again, He afforded proof that the despised One was Immanuel. Thus, if Christ—to the amazement of His forerunner—submitted to the ordinance of baptism, yet, at that very time, the heavens were "opened *unto Him*" (Mat 3:16), and the Spirit descended like as a dove upon Him, and the voice of the Father was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat 3:17; Mat 17:5; 2Pe 1:17).

Yes, the key to the deeper meaning of much in the Gospels is found in keeping before us the distinction between the Person and the place He took. He was the Holy One, but He took the place of His sinful people. As the Holy One, ineffable joy, unclouded blessedness, the love and homage of all creatures was His legitimate due. Treading the path of obedience, the smile of God, and the ordering of His providences

accordingly were what He was justly entitled to. Wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Pro 3:17), and Christ ever trod Wisdom's ways without any deviation—why then did He encounter so much unpleasantness and opposition? "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Pro 16:7), and Christ always pleased Him (Joh 8:29); yet, the Father was far from making *His* enemies at peace with Him. Why? Ignore the office which Christ had taken (and was discharging from Bethlehem onwards!), and we are left without any possible solution.

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mat 8:20; Luk 9:58). The real force of that pathetic statement can best be perceived by grasping the meaning of the particular title which the Saviour here employed. It has its roots in the following O.T. passages: "The stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?" (Job 25:5, 6); "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa 8:4 and compare Psa 146:3), from which it will be seen that it is a term of abasement and ignominy, expressive of lowly condition. In its application to Christ, it connotes not only His true humanity, but also the humiliation and shame into which He descended. It is descriptive of His person, but more especially of His *office*; in other words, it points to Him as "the Second Man," the "last Adam," and as such, entering our lot, sharing our misery, serving as our Surety. Christ appropriated this title unto Himself as marking His condescending grace and as displaying the condition, which He had taken to Himself.

A certain scribe had offered to follow Jesus wherever He went, and "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mat 8:20; Luk 9:58) was His response. It was not only a word bidding him count the cost, but an announcement that *His* path led to the place where none could accompany Him. It was more than a declaration that He who was rich for our sakes became poor in order to reinstate us: It was an intimation that He had voluntarily subjected Himself to the consequences of sin, that He would therefore be treated as a sinner both by God and by men, that He had entered the place of His disinherited people (driven out: Genesis 3:24); and therefore, that He had no claim to ought in this world. "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat 20:28). Thus, it is clear that this "Son of man" title contemplates Christ as the humbled One. Confirmatory of this, it is the fact that He is never referred to by it after His resurrection—though as "the Son of man," He appropriately receives His reward (Dan 7:13, Mat 26:64; Joh 5:27).

Justice demands that each one shall receive his due. Now the Lord Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb 7:26)—then to what was He lawfully entitled at the hands of a righteous God? Does not the Judge of all the earth do right! Then how shall He order His governmental dealings toward the One who eminently honoured and glorified Him? Must He not show Himself strong on His behalf? Must He not shower upon Him the ceaseless tokens of His favour? Must He not turn the hearts of all men unto Him in loving homage? Certainly—but for one thing! Though personally holy, yet officially the guilt of His people rested upon Him. In view of Psalm 37:25, how can we possibly account for the righteous One Himself being forsaken by God in the hour of His acutest extremity? Only one answer is possible—and that is furnished by what we have sought to set before the reader:

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In *my* place condemned He stood."

Blessed be God if the reader can, by sovereign grace, respond with us:

"Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!"

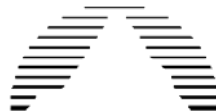
If we shut our eyes to the solemn fact that the Son of God entered this world charged with the guilt of His people, then are we confronted with the supreme anomaly, the most flagrant injustice of all history. For on the one hand, we have the Personification of all virtue and moral excellency; and on the other, God suffering Him to be traduced as One possessed of a "demon" (Joh 10:20). On the one hand, we have the supreme Benefactor of mankind ever going about and doing good; and yet, God so ordering His lot that He "had not where to lay His head" (Mat 8:20; Luk 9:58). On the one hand, we have Him preaching glad tidings to the poor and binding up the broken hearted; and on the other hand, God allowing Him to be so dealt with by those whom He befriended that He cried, "Reproach hath broken my heart" (Psa 69:20). On the one hand, we have Him manifested as Love incarnate; yet, on the other, God permitting His enemies to vent their bitterest hatred upon Him. In the case of all others, we discern the principle of sowing and reaping, of the connection between conduct and the consequences which it righteously entails; but in the case of

our Lord, there was not, so far as He personally acted and was treated. Yet bring into account the *relation* which He sustained to His guilty people, and the anomaly and seeming injustice vanishes.

Perhaps some readers are inclined to say: I can see why it was necessary for Christ as our Substitute to endure the wrath of *God*, but I am rather at a loss to understand why He should have to suffer such cruel treatment at the hands of *men*. True, their vile conduct against the Lord of glory demonstrated as nothing else the fearful depravity of human nature, but why did the Father—under His righteous government of the world—permit His Son to be so unjustly dealt with by Jews and Gentiles alike? Though it was ordained that He should be crucified and slain by wicked hands (Act 2:23), yet wherein lay the necessity for Him to be so mistreated by His own creatures?—and that, not only during “the Passion week” but throughout the whole course of His ministry? In the light of what we have sought to point out, there should surely be no difficulty at this point: It is only a matter of giving a wider application to that basic and illuminating principle.

As the Surety of His people, Christ entered this world charged with *all* their guilt; and therefore, He had to suffer not only for their sins against God, but also against their fellows. We have broken *both* tables of the Law; and therefore, the Redeemer must endure the penalty of both. See then, in the treatment meted out to Him by men, what *we* deserve, because of our woeful failure to love our neighbour as ourselves. As our Substitute, a life of reproach among men was His due. Therefore, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (Joh 1:11); but instead, despised and rejected Him. Therefore was He, throughout His course, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3), subjected to contempt, constantly persecuted by His enemies. The very next verse in Isaiah 53 explains why He was the Man of sorrows: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa 53:4). Therefore, was the sin-Bearer deserted by all His apostles (Mat 26:56), as well as forsaken by God.

It is indeed in the closing scenes of “the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7) that we may perceive most clearly Christ occupying the place of His people and receiving both from man and God that which was due unto us. As we view Him before Caiaphas and Herod, we must not be occupied only with the *human* side of things, but look higher and see Divine justice directing all. The Romans were renowned for their respect of law, their equity of dealings, and their mild treatment of those they conquered. Then how shall we account for the conduct of Pilate and his soldiers?—and especially, why did God require His Son to be mocked with a trial that appears worse than a farce? Because though personally innocent, He was officially guilty.



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