

March, 1936
Studies in the Scriptures.
The Spirit Witnessing.

The Holy Spirit is first a witness *for* Christ, and then He is a witness *to* His people of Christ's infinite love and the sufficiency of His finished work. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify ("bear witness") of Me" (John 15:26). The Spirit bears His testimony for Christ in the Scriptures; He bears His testimony to us in our renewed minds. He is a Witness for the Lord Jesus by all that is revealed in the Sacred Volume concerning Him. He bears witness to the abiding efficacy of Christ's offering: that sin is effectually put away thereby, that the Father hath accepted it, that the elect are forever perfected thereby, and that pardon of sins is the fruit of Christ's oblation.

The sufficiency of the Spirit to be Witness for Christ unto His people appears first, from His being a Divine Person; second, from His being present when the Everlasting Covenant was drawn up; third, from His perfect knowledge of the identity of each member of the election of grace. When the ordained hour strikes for each one to be quickened by Him, He capacitates the soul to receive a spiritual knowledge of Christ. He shines upon the Scriptures of Truth and into the renewed mind. He enables the one born again to receive into his heart the Father's record concerning His beloved Son, and to give full credit to it. He enables him to realise that the Father is everlastingly well pleased with every one who is satisfied with the Person, righteousness, and atonement of His co-equal Son, and who rests his entire hope and salvation thereon. Thereby He assures him of the Father's acceptance of him in the Beloved.

Now the Spirit is a Witness unto God's people both objectively and subjectively: that is to say, He bears witness *to* them, and He also bears witness *in* them; such is His wondrous grace toward them. His witness to them is in and through and by means of the Scriptures. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a Witness to us" (Heb. 10:14, 15), which is explained in what immediately follows. A quotation is made from the Prophet Jeremiah, who had spoken as he was moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The Lord declares of His people "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). Whereupon the Holy Spirit points out, "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (v. 18). Thus does He witness to us, through the Word, of the sufficiency and finality of Christ's one offering.

But something more is still required by God's needy people, for they are the subjects of many fears, and Satan frequently attacks their faith. It is not that they have any doubt about the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, or the unerring reliability of every thing recorded therein. Nor is it that they are disposed for a moment to call into question the infinite sufficiency and abiding efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. No; that which occasions them such deep concern is, whether *they* have a saving interest therein. Not only are they aware that there is a faith (such as the demons have—James 2:19) which obtains no salvation, not only do they perceive that the faith of which many empty professors boast so loudly is *not evidenced* by their works, but they discover so much in themselves that appears to be altogether incompatible with their being new creatures in Christ, until they often fear their own conversion was but a delusion after all.

When an honest soul contemplates the amazing greatness of the honour and the stu-

pendousness of the relation of regarding itself as a joint-heir with Christ, it is startled and staggered. What, *me* a child of God! God *my* Father! Who am I to be thus exalted into the Divine favour? Surely it cannot be so. When I consider my fearful sinfulness and unworthiness, the awful depravity of my heart, the carnality of my mind, such rebellion of will, so prone to evil every moment, and such glaring flaws in all I undertake—surely I cannot have been made a partaker of the Divine nature. It seems impossible; and Satan is ever ready to assure me that I am not God's child. If the reader be a stranger to such tormenting fears, we sincerely pity him. But if his experience tallies with what we have just described, he will see how indispensable it is that the Holy Spirit should bear witness to him *within*.

But there are some who say that it is a sin for the Christian to question his acceptance with God because he is still so depraved, or to doubt his salvation because he can perceive little or no holiness within. They say that such doubting is to call God's Truth and faithfulness into question, for He has assured us of His love and His readiness to save all who believe in His Son. They affirm it is not our duty to examine our hearts, that we shall never obtain any assurance by so doing; that we must look to Christ alone, and rest on His naked Word. But does not Scripture say, "For our rejoicing is this, *the testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12)? And again; we are told, "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And *hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure our hearts* before Him" (1 John 3:18, 19).

But it is insisted that Scripture forbids all doubting: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). Yes, but Christ was *not* there blaming Peter for doubting his spiritual *state*, but for fearing he would be drowned. Yet Christ "upbraided them with their unbelief" (Mark 16:14): true, for not believing He was risen from the dead—not for calling into question their regeneration! But Abraham is commended because "against hope (all appearances)" he "believed in hope" (Rom. 4:18): yes, and that was that he should have a son!—how is that relevant to what we are now discussing? But "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7): yes, the conduct of the Apostles was governed by a realisation of that which is to come (see v. 11). But "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23): but this is nothing to the purpose; if a man does not believe it is right to do some act, and yet ventures to do it, he sins.

Let us define more closely the point now under discussion. We may state it thus: Does God require anyone to believe he has been born again when he has no clear *evidence* that such be the case? Surely the question answers itself: the God of Truth never asks any one to believe a lie. If my sins have *not* been pardoned, then the more firmly convinced I am that they *have been*, the worse for me; and very ready is Satan to second me in my self-deception! The Devil would have me assured that all is well with me, *without* a diligent search and thorough examination for sufficient *evidence* that I am a new creature in Christ. O how many he is deceiving by making them believe it is wrong to challenge their profession and put their hearts to a real trial.

True, it *is* a sin for a real Christian so to live that his evidences of regeneration are not clear; but it is no sin for him to be honest and impartial, or to doubt when, in fact, his evidences are not clear. It is sin to darken my evidences, but it is no sin to discover that they *are* darkened. It is a sin for a man, by rioting and drunkenness, to make himself ill; but it

but it is no sin to *feel* he is sick, if there be grounds for it, to doubt if he will survive his sickness. Our sins bring upon us *inward* calamities as well as outward, but these are chastisements rather than sins. It is the Christian's sins which lay the foundation for doubts, which occasions them; yet those doubtings are not themselves sins.

But it will be said, believers are exhorted to "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6) and that "we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (v. 14). Yes, but *that* "confidence" is that Jesus is the Christ, together with a true faith in Him, as is clear from the whole context there. Nothing is more absurd than to say that professing Christians are made partakers of Christ by holding fast the confidence *that they are saved*, for that is what many a *deceived* soul does, and does to the very end (Matt. 7:22). There can be no well-grounded confidence unless it rests upon clear evidence or reliable testimony. And for *that*, there must be not only "the answer of a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21), but the confirmatory witness of the Spirit. But our space is exhausted—see the April cover-pages article for the continuation of this.—A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

99. *The Superiority of Christianity.* 12:22-24.

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and Church of the firstborn, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (12:22-24). In these verses the Apostle completes the last great contrast which he drew between Judaism and Christianity, in which he displays the immeasurable superiority of the later over the former. Though there may not be in them much of personal interest to some of our readers, yet we feel it incumbent upon us to give the same careful attention to this passage as we have to the previous sections of this Epistle.

The central design of the Apostle in verses 18-24 was to convince the believing Hebrews of the pre-eminence of the new covenant above the old, that is, of the Gospel economy over the Legal. To this end he first directed attention to the awful phenomena which attended the institution of Judaism, and now he sets before them the attractive features which characterises Christianity. Everything connected with the giving of the Law was fearful and terrifying, but all that marks the Evangelical system is blessed and winsome. The manifestations of the Divine presence at Sinai though vivid and truly magnificent, were awe-inspiring, but the revelation of His love and grace in the Gospel prompts to peace and joy. Those pertained to things of the earth, these concern Heaven itself; those were addressed to the senses of the body, these call into exercise the higher faculties of the soul.

When going over verses 18-21 we sought to make clear the *figurative* meaning of their contents. Though there be in them an allusion to historical facts, yet it should be obvious that it is not with their literal signification the Apostle was chiefly concerned. As this may not be fully apparent to some of our readers, we must labour the point a little—rendered the more necessary by the gross and carnal ideas entertained by modern dispensationalists. Surely it is quite plain to any unbiased mind that when he said, “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire” (Heb. 12:18) the Apostle had reference to something else than a mountain in Arabia. There would be neither force nor even sense in telling Christians “Ye are not come to mount Sinai”—why even of the Hebrew believers it is improbable that any of them had ever seen it.

If then, the words “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched” refer not to any material mount, then they must intimate *that order of things* which was formally inaugurated at Sinai, the moral features of which were suitably symbolized and strikingly adumbrated by the physical phenomena which attended the giving of the Law. This we sought to show in the course of the two previous months’ articles. Now the same principle of interpretation holds good and must be applied to the terms of the passage upon which we are now entering. “But ye are come unto mount Sion” (v. 22) no more has reference to a natural mountain than “We have an altar” (Heb. 13:10) means that Christians have a tangible and visible altar. Whatever future the earthly Sion may yet have, it is the antitypical, the spiritual, the Heavenly Sion, which is here in view.

One of the hardest tasks which sometimes confronts the careful and honest expositor of Holy Writ is to determine when its language is to be understood literally and when it is to be regarded as figurative. Nor is this always to be settled so easily as many suppose:

the old controversy upon the meaning of our Lord's words at the institution of the holy "Supper," "This is My body" shows otherwise. It had been a simple matter for Him to say "This (bread) *represents* My body," but He did not—why, is best known to Himself. Nor does this example stand by any means alone: much of Christ's language was of a figurative character, and more than once His own Apostle's failed to understand His purport—see Matthew 16:5-7; Mark 7:14-18; John 4:31-34 and 21:22, 23.

No, it is by no means always an easy matter to determine when the language of Scripture is to be regarded literally, and when it is to be understood figuratively. In previous generations perhaps there was a tendency to "spiritualize" too much: whether that be so or no, certainly the pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme. How very often do we hear it said, "The language of Scripture means just what it says, and says just what it means." Many believe that such a declaration is very honouring to God's Word, and suppose that anything to the contrary savours strongly of "Modernism." But, surely, a little reflection will soon indicate that such a statement needs qualifying, for there is not a little of the language of Scripture which *must* be understood other than literally.

To say nothing about many poetic expressions in the Psalms (such as "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"), and symbolic language in the Prophets (like "then will I sprinkle clean water upon you . . . I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh"), take such a saying of our Lord's as this: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions" (Mark 10:29, 30)—the impossibility of *literalizing* such a promise appears, for example, in a man's receiving or having a hundred mothers. Now if *that* statement is not to be interpreted literally, why should an outcry be raised if the writer presents good reasons for interpreting *other* verses figuratively?

After reading the above, some may be inclined to say, "All of this is very bewildering and confusing." Our reply is, Then you must have sat under very superficial preaching: any well-instructed scribe would have taught you that there is great variety used in the language of Holy Writ, and often much care and pains are required in order to ascertain its precise character—that is one reason why God has graciously provided "*teachers*" (Eph. 4:11) for His people. True, the path of duty is so plainly defined for us that the wayfaring man (though a fool) need not err therein; but that does not alter the fact that in order to ascertain the exact significance of many particular expressions of Scripture, much prayer, study, and comparing passage with passage, is called for. The Bible is not a lazy man's book, and the Holy Spirit has designedly put not a little therein to stain the pride of men.

Now much help is obtained upon this difficulty by recognising that many of the things which pertain to the new covenant are expressed in language taken from the old, the antitype being presented under the phraseology of the type. For instance, when Christ announced the free intercourse between Heaven and earth which was to result from His mediation, He described it to Nathanael in the words of Jacob's vision: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51)—not that the Lord Jesus was ever to present the appearance of a ladder for that purpose, such as the patriarch saw in his dream, but that spiritually there would be a like medium of communication established and the agency of a like intercourse

maintained. In a similar manner, the death of Christ is frequently spoken of under the terms of the Levitical sacrifices, while the application of His atonement to the soul is called the “sprinkling of His blood on the conscience.”

Not until we clearly perceive that most of that which pertains to the new economy is exhibited to us under the images of the old, are we in the position to understand much of the language found in the Prophets, and many of the expressions employed by our Lord and His Apostles. Thus, Christ is spoken of as “our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7) and as Priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20). Paradise is described as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). The New Testament saints are referred to as “the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7) as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), as “the Circumcision” (Phil. 3:3), as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9), and that “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). Such terminology as this should amply prepare us for “ye are come unto *Mount Sion*,” and should remove all uncertainty as to what is denoted thereby.

“But ye are come unto Mount Sion” (Heb. 12:22). In these words the Apostle commences the second member of the comparison between Judaism and Christianity, which completes the foundation on which he bases the great exhortation found in verses 25-29. In the former member (vv. 18-21) he had described the state of the Israelitish people (and the Church in it) as they existed under the Legal economy, taken from the terror-producing character of the giving of the Law and the nature of its demands: “they could not endure that which was commanded . . . and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb. 12:20-21). But now the Apostle contrasted the blessed and glorious state into which believers have been called by the Gospel, thereby, making manifest how incomparably more excellent was the new covenant it itself than the old, and, how infinitely more beneficial are its privileges unto those whom Divine grace gives a part therein. No less than eight of these privileges are here enumerated—always the number of *a new beginning*.

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph. 1:10). These words throw light on the passage now before us: all the *spiritual* things of grace and glory, both in Heaven and in earth, have been headed up in Christ, so that they all now centre in Him. By His mediatorial work the Lord Jesus has repaired the great breach which the sin of Adam entailed. Before sin entered the world there was perfect harmony between Heaven and earth, man and angels uniting in hymning their glorious Creator: together they formed one spiritual society of worshippers. But upon the Fall, that spiritual union was broken, and not only did the human race (in their federal head) become alienated from God Himself, but they became alienated from the holy spirits which surround His throne. But the last Adam has restored the disruption which the first Adam’s sin produced, and in reconciling His people to God, He has also brought them back into fellowship with the angelic hosts..

Now because God has gathered together in one, recapitulated or headed up, “all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are in earth,” when we savingly “come” to Christ we, at the same time, “come” to all that God has made to centre in Him; or, in other words, we obtain an interest or right in all that is headed up in Him. Let the reader seek to grasp clearly this fact: it is because believers have been brought *to Christ* that they “are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly

Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels!" (Heb. 12:22). By their initiation into the Gospel state, Christians are also inducted into and given access unto all these privileges: Christ and His mediation are specifically mentioned at the close of the various privileges here listed (v. 24), to teach us it is on *that* account we are interested in them and as the reason for our being so interested.

Yes, it is to *Christ* and Him alone (though not, of course, to the exclusion of the Father and His eternal love or the Holy Spirit and His gracious operations) that the Christian owes every blessing: his standing before God, his new creation state, his induction into the society of the holy, his eternal inheritance. It was by Christ that he was delivered from the condemnation and curse of the Law, with the unspeakable terror it caused him. And it is by Christ that he has been brought to the antitypical Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem. Not by anything he has done or will do are such inestimable blessings made his. Observe how jealously the Spirit of Truth has guarded this very point, in using the passive and not the active voice: the verb is "ye *are* come" and "ye *have* come." The same fact is emphasised in 1 Peter 2:25—"ye were as sheep going astray; but *are* (not "have") now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"—because of what the Spirit wrought in us, we being entirely passive.

"But ye are come unto Mount Sion." We need hardly say that this language looks back to the "Zion" of the Old Testament, the variation in spelling being due to the difference between the Hebrew and Greek word. It is in fact to the Old Testament we must turn for light upon our present verse, and, as usual, the *initial* reference is the one which supplies us with the needed key. The first time that "Zion" is mentioned there is in 2 Samuel 5:6, 7, "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land . . . thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David." The deeper significance of this appears when we carefully ponder *its setting*: Zion was captured by David when Israel had been thoroughly tried and found completely wanting. It occurred at a notable crisis in the history of the Nation, namely, after the priesthood had been deplorably corrupted (1 Sam. 2:22, 25) and after the king of *their* choice (Saul) had reduced himself (1 Sam. 28:7) and them (1 Sam. 31:1, 7) to the lowest degradation.

It was, then, at a time when Israel's fortunes were at a low ebb, when they were thoroughly disheartened, and when (because of their great wickedness) they had the least reason to expect it, that God graciously intervened. Just when Saul and Jonathan had been slain in battle, when the Philistines triumphed and Israel had fled before them in dismay, the Lord brought forth the man of *His* choice—David, whose name means the "Beloved." Up to this time the hill of Zion had been a continual menace to Israel, but now David wrested it out of the hand of the Jebusites and made it the stronghold of Jerusalem. On one of its eminences the temple was erected, which was the dwellingplace of Jehovah in the midst of His people. "Zion," then, stands for the highest revelation of Divine *grace* in Old Testament times.

Zion lay to the south-west of Jerusalem, being the oldest and highest part of that ancient city. It was outside of the city itself and separate from it, though in Scripture frequently identified with it. Mount Zion had two heads or peaks: Moriah on which the temple was erected, the seat of the *worship* of God; and the other, whereon the palace of David was built, the *royal* residence of the kings of Judah—a striking figure of the priestly and kingly offices meeting in Christ. Zion, then, was situated in the best part of

the world—Canaan, the land which flowed with milk and honey; in the best part of that land—in Judah's portion; in the best part of his heritage—Jerusalem; and in the best part of that metropolis—the highest point, the “city of David.” Let the interested reader carefully ponder the following passages and observe the precious things said of Zion: Psalm 48:2, 3; 50:2; 132:13, 14; 133:3.

“Zion is, first, the place of God's habitation, where He dwells forever: Psalm 9:11; 76:2. Second, it is the seat of the throne, reign and kingdom of Christ: Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 24:23. Third, it is the object of Divine promises innumerable: Psalm 125:1; 128:5, of Christ Himself: Isaiah 59:20. Fourth, thence did the Gospel proceed and the law of Christ come forth: Isaiah 40:9, Micah 4:2. Fifth, it was the object of God's especial love, and the place of the birth of His elect: Psalm 87:2, 5. Sixth, the joy of the whole earth: Psalm 48:2. Seventh, salvation and all blessings came forth out of Zion: Psalm 14:7; 110:2; 128:5. Now these things were not spoken of nor accomplished towards that Mount Zion which was in Jerusalem absolutely, but only as it was *typical* of believers under the Gospel; so the meaning of the Apostle is, that by the Gospel believers do come to that state wherein they have an interest in and a right to all the blessed and glorious things that are spoken in the Scriptures concerning and to Zion. All the privileges ascribed, all the promises made to it, are theirs. Zion is the place of God's especial gracious residence, of the throne of Christ in His reign, the object of all promises. This is the first privilege of believers under the Gospel. They come to Mount Zion, they are interested in all the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures made to Zion; in all the love and care of God expressed towards it, in all the spiritual glories assigned to it. The things spoken of it were never accomplished in the earthly Zion, but only typically; spiritually, and in their reality, they belong to believers under the New Testament” (John Owen).

The contrasts between Sinai and Sion were very marked. The former was located in one of the dreariest and driest places on earth, a “howling desert”; the other was situated in the midst of that land which flowed with milk and honey. The one was ugly, barren, forbidding; the other was “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth.” Sinai was enveloped in “blackness and darkness,” while Sion signified “sunny” or “shown upon.” God came down on Sinai for only a brief moment, but He dwells in Sion “forever.” On the former He appeared in terrible majesty; in the other He is manifested in grace and blessing. At Sinai the typical mediator trembled and quaked; on Sion Christ is crowned with glory and honour.

“But ye are come to Mount Sion.” By this, then, we understand, first, that in being brought to Christ, the believer comes to the antitypical, the spiritual, Sion. Second, more specifically, we understand by this expression that believers are come to *the Throne of Grace*. Just as, originally, the historical Sion was *a menace* to Israel, so while we were under the curse of the Law God's throne was one of *judgment*. But, just as David (the “Beloved”) secured Sion for Israel and it became the place of blessing, where God abode in grace, so as the result of Christ's work, the Throne of Heaven has become the Throne of Grace, He being Himself seated thereon. Third, in its wider scope, it signifies that believers have a right or title to all the good and glorious things spoken of and to Sion in the Old Testament.

“And unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” by which we understand Heaven itself, of which the earthly Jerusalem—the seat and centre of the worship of God—was the emblem. From earliest times the saints were taught by the Holy Spirit to

contemplate the future blessedness of the righteous under the image of a splendid “City,” reared on permanent foundations. Of Abraham it is declared, “He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). The force of that statement is best perceived in the light of the previous verse: “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.” Abraham was given to realise that Canaan was but a figure of his everlasting heritage, and therefore did he look forward to (v. 10), “seek” (v. 14), and “desire a better country, that is, an heavenly” (v. 16). The eternal Abode of the blessed is there called both a “City” and a “Country.”

Many are the allusions to this “City” in the Psalms and the Prophets: we single out a few of the more prominent ones. “There is a river (The Spirit), the streams (His graces) whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High” (Psa. 46:4). “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness” (Psa. 48:1). “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (Psa. 87:3). “He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psa. 107:7). “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks” (Isa. 26:1). It is to be noted that in several passages the “City” is mentioned with particular reference to “Zion,” for we can only have access to God via the Throne of Grace: John 14:6.

The “City of the living God” intimates the *nearness* of the saints to God, for Jerusalem was adjacent to Zion—*their* homes and dwellings were near to *His*. This figure of the “city” is also found in “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but *fellow citizens* with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19)—see too Revelation 3:12. It is designated “the heavenly Jerusalem” in contrast from the earthly, the “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). It is referred to again in Hebrews 13:14. A “city” is a place of permanent residence, in contrast from the moving tent of the wilderness. In Bible times 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 is lacking which is good and blessed.

“But ye are come unto . . . the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” “The Apostle herein prefers the privileges of the Gospel not only above what the people were made partakers of at Sinai in the wilderness, but also above all that they afterwards enjoyed in Jerusalem in the land of Canaan. In the glory and privileges of that city the Hebrews greatly boasted. But the Apostle casts *that* city in the state wherein it then was, into the *same* condition with Mount Sinai in Arabia, that is, *under bondage*, as indeed it then was (Gal. 4:25); and he opposeth thereunto that ‘Jerusalem which is above,’ that is, this heavenly Jerusalem. This the second privilege of the Gospel-state, wherein all the remaining promises of the Old Testament are transferred and made over to believers: whatever is spoken of the city of God or of Jerusalem that is *spiritual*, that contains in it the love or favour of God, it is all made theirs; faith can lay a claim to it all.

“Believers are to ‘come’ to this city, as to be inhabitants, free denizens, possessors of it, to whom all the rights, privileges, and immunities of it do belong; and what is spoken of it in the Scripture is a ground of faith to them, and a spring of consolation. For they may with confidence make application of what is so spoken to themselves in every condition. A ‘city’ is the only place of rest, peace, safety and honour, among men in this world:

to all these in the spiritual sense we are brought by the Gospel. Whilst men are under the Law they are at Sinai—in a wilderness where is none of these things; the souls of sinners can find no place of rest or safety under the Law. But we have all these things by the Gospel: rest in Christ, peace with God, order in the communion of faith, safety in Divine protection, and honour in our relation to God in Christ” (John Owen).—A.W.P.

The Life of David.

51. His fearful fall.

A difficult and most unwelcome task now confronts us: to contemplate and comment upon the darkest blot of all in the fair character of David. But who are we, so full of sin in ourself, unworthy to unloose his shoes, to take it upon us to sit in judgment upon the sweet Psalmist of Israel? Certainly we would not select this subject from personal choice, for it affords us no pleasure to gaze upon an eminent saint of God befouling himself in the mire of evil. O that we may be enabled to approach it with true humility, in fear and trembling, remembering that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). Only then may we hope to derive any profit from our perusal; the same applies to the reader. Before proceeding further, let each of us ask God to awe our hearts by the solemn scene which is to be before us.

It must be for God's glory and our profit that the Holy Spirit has placed on record this account of David's fearful fall, otherwise it would not have been given a permanent place on the imperishable pages of Holy Writ. But in order to derive any good from it for our souls, it is surely necessary that we approach this sad incident with a sober mind and in a spirit of meekness "considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). This inspired record is to be regarded as a Divine beacon, warning us of the rocks upon which David's life was wrecked; as a danger-signal, bidding us be on our guard, lest we, through unwatchfulness, experience a similar calamity. Viewed thus, there are valuable lessons to be learned; instruction which will stand us in good stead if it be humbly appropriated.

The fearful fall of David supplies a concrete exemplification of many solemn statements of Scripture concerning the nature and character of fallen man. Its teaching in regard to human depravity is very pointed and unpalatable, and often has it been made a subject of unholy jest by godless scoffers. Such declarations as, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21), "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), "in my flesh dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18), are highly objectionable to human pride, yet *the truth* of them cannot be gainsaid. Fearful and forbidding as are such descriptions of fallen man, nevertheless their accuracy is illustrated and demonstrated again and again in the lives of Bible characters, as well as in the world today.

Rightly has it been said that, "One of the most astounding demonstrations of the truth of the Bible is its unhesitating revelation and denunciation of sin, in the professed follower of God. It conceals nothing; on the contrary, it pulls aside the veil and discloses all. It condones nothing; instead, it either utters the terrible wrath of God against the guilty one, or records His judgments as they fall upon the unhappy sinner, even to the third and fourth generation (Exo. 34:7).

"It exalts Noah as a preacher of righteousness in an evil and violent generation; with equal faithfulness it records his drunkenness and shame (Gen. 9:20, 21). Abraham is set before us as a man of faith. In the hour of famine, instead of waiting in quietness upon God, he goes down into Egypt. Once there, he persuades his wife to misrepresent her relationship to him, and through the acted falsehood imperils his peace and her own (Gen. 12:12, 13). Lot falls away after his deliverance from Sodom, and through love of wine is subjected to the lust of his wanton daughters. Aaron and Miriam are filled with jealousy and speak evilly against Moses, their brother. Moses speaks unadvisedly with his lips,

and is shut out from the land of promise. The white light of truth flashes on every page, and the faults, the follies, the sins and inexcusable iniquities of those who call themselves the people and servants of God, are seen in all their repulsive forms" (I.M.H.).

Thus it was in the tragic case now before us. The fearful conduct of David reveals to us with terrible vividness that not only is the natural man a fallen and depraved creature, but also that the redeemed and regenerated man is liable to fall into the most heinous evil; yea, that unless God is pleased to sovereignly interpose, unwatchfulness on the part of the believer is certain to issue in consequences highly dishonouring to the Lord and fearfully injurious to himself. This it is which above all else makes our present portion so unspeakably solemn: here we behold the lusts of the flesh allowed full sway not by a man of the world, but by a member of the household of faith; here we behold a saint, eminent in holiness, in an unguarded moment, surprised, seduced, and led captive by the devil. The "flesh" in the believer is no different and no better than the flesh in an unbeliever!

Yes, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, who had enjoyed such long and close communion with God, still had the "flesh" within him, and because he *failed to mortify* its lusts, he now flung away the joys of Divine fellowship, defiled his conscience, ruined his soul's prosperity, brought down upon himself (for all his remaining years) a storm of calamities, and made his name and religion a target for the arrows of sarcasm and blasphemy of each succeeding generation. Every claim that God had upon him, every obligation of his high office, all the fences which Divine mercy had provided, were ruthlessly trampled under foot by the fiery lust now burning in him. He who in the day of his distress cried, "my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psa. 42:2) now lusted after a forbidden object. Alas, what is man? Truly "man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psa. 39:5).

But how are we to account for David's fearful fall? Why was it that he succumbed so readily in the presence of temptation? What was it that led up to and occasioned his heinous sin? These questions are capable of a twofold answer, according as we view them in the light of the high sovereignty of God or the responsibility of man; for the present we shall consider them from the latter viewpoint. And it is here we should derive the most practical help for our own souls; it is in tracing the *relation* between God's chastisements and what occasions them, between men's sins and what leads up to them, that we discover what is most essential for us to lay to heart. The reasons why Abraham "went down to Egypt" are revealed in the context. Peter's denial of Christ may be traced back to his self-confidence in following his Master "afar off." And, we shall see, the Divine record enables us to trace David's fall back to the springs which occasioned it.

"And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house" (2 Sam. 11:1-4). We cannot do better than seek to fill in the outline of Matthew Henry's on these verses: first, the occasions of this sin; second, the steps of sin; third, the aggravations of the sin.

The occasions of or what led up to David's fearful fall are plainly intimated in the above verses. We begin by noticing the time-mark here mentioned: "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle" (v. 1), which signifies, at the season of spring, after the winter is over. Following the period of enforced inactivity, upon the return of favourable weather, the military activities against the Ammonites were resumed: Joab and the army went forth, "BUT David tarried still at Jerusalem." Ominous "But," noting the Spirit's disapproval at the king's conduct. Here is the first key which explains what follows, and we do well to weigh it attentively, for it is recorded "for *our* learning" and warning. Reduced to its simplest terms, that which is here signified is *David's failure to follow the path of duty*.

It is obvious that at this time the king's place—his accustomed one hitherto (see 10:17)—was at the head of his fighting men, leading them to the overthrow of Israel's enemies. Had he been out fighting the battles of the Lord, he had not been subject to the temptation which soon confronted him. It may appear a very trifling matter in our eyes that the king should tarry at Jerusalem: if so, it shows we sadly fail to view things in their proper perspective—it is never a trifling matter to forsake *the post of obligation*, be that post the most menial one. The fact is that we cannot count upon Divine protection when we forsake the path of duty. *That* was the force of our Saviour's reply when the Devil bade Him cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; that pinnacle lay not in the path of His duty, hence His "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

David relaxed when he should have girded on the sword: he preferred the luxuries of the palace to the hardships of the battlefield! Ah, it is so easy to follow the line of least resistance. It requires grace (diligently sought) to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Alas that David had failed to profit from a previous failure along this same line: when he had *sought rest* among the Philistines at an earlier date, he fell readily into sin (1 Sam. 21:13); so it was now, when he sought ease in Jerusalem. The important principle here for the Christian to lay to heart is, David had *taken off his armour*, and therefore he was without protection when the Enemy assailed him. Ah, my reader, this world is no place to rest in; rather is it the arena where faith has to wage its fight, and that fight is certain to be a losing one if we disregard that exhortation "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house" (2 Sam. 11:2). Here is the second thing for us to observe: not only had David shunned the post of duty, but he was guilty of *slothfulness*. It was not the slumbers of nighttime which the Spirit here takes notice of, for it was eveningtide when he "arose"—it was the afternoon which he had wasted in self-luxuriation. David had failed to redeem the time: he was not engaged either in seeking to be of use to others, or in improving himself. Laziness gives great advantage to the Tempter: it was "while men slept" that the Enemy "came and sowed tares among the wheat" (Matt. 13:25). It is written "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule (in measure, over his lusts): but the slothful shall be *under tribute*" (Prov. 12:24).

What a word is this "I went by the field of *the slothful*, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, *lo*, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Prov. 24:30, 31). Does not the reader perceive the *spiritual* meaning of this: the "field" is his life, open be-

fore all; the “vineyard” (private property) is his heart. And what a state they are in: through idle neglect, filled with that which is obnoxious to God and worthless to men. “Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction” (v. 32). Do *we*? do we lay it to heart and profit therefrom when we behold so many wrecked and fruitless lives around us—ruined by spiritual *indolence*. “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (vv. 33, 34)—are not those verses a solemn commentary on 2 Samuel 11:2!

“And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon” (2 Sam. 11:2). Here is the third thing: *a wandering eye*. In Isaiah 33:15, 16 we are told concerning the one that “shutteth his eye from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks.” Alas, this is what David did not do: instead, he suffered his eyes to dwell upon an alluring but prohibited object. Among his prayers was this petition, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity” (Psa 119:37), but we cannot expect God to answer us if we deliberately spy upon the privacy of others. We turn now to consider the actual steps in this fall.

“And David sent and inquired after the woman” (2 Sam. 11:3). He purposed now to satisfy his lust. He who had once boasted “I *will* behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I *will* walk within my house with a perfect heart. I *will* set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A forward heart shall depart from me: I *will not* know a wicked person” (Psa. 101:2-4), now determined to commit adultery. Note the repeated “I will” in the above passage, and learn therefrom how much the “free will” of man is worth!

“And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Sam. 11:3). Here was calm deliberation and pre-meditation on the part of David. Here too was a merciful interposition on the part of God, for one of the king’s servants dared to remind his royal master that the woman he was inquiring about was the *wife* of another. How often does the Lord in His grace and faithfulness place some obstacle across our path, when we are planning something which is evil in his sight! It is this which renders our sin far worse, when we defiantly break through any hedge which the providence of God places about us. O that we may draw back with a shudder when such obstacles confront us, and not rush blindly like an ox to the slaughter.

“And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her” (2 Sam. 11:4). The order is very solemn: first “he saw” (v. 2), then he “sent and inquired” (v. 3), and now “he lay with her.” Yet that does not give us the complete picture: we need to go back to verse 1 in order to take in the entire scene, and as we do, we obtain a vivid and solemn illustration of what is declared in James 1:14, 15. First, David was “drawn away of his own lust”—of fleshly ease and indolence; second, he was then “enticed”—by the sight of a beautiful woman; third, “then when lust had conceived, it brought forth sin”—that of premeditated adultery; and, as the terrible sequel shows, “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth *death*”—the murder of Uriah her husband.

The *aggravations* of his sin were marked and many. First, David was no longer a hot-blooded youth, but a man of some fifty years of age. Second, he was not a single man, but one who already had several wives of his own—this is emphasised in 12:8, when God sent the prophet to charge him with his wickedness. Third, he had sons who had almost

reached the age of manhood: what a fearful example for a father to set before them! Fourth, he was the king of Israel, and therefore under binding obligation to set before his subjects a pattern of righteousness. Fifth, Uriah, the man whom he so grievously wronged, was even then hazarding his life in the king's service. And above all, he was a child of God, and as such, under bonds to honour and glorify His name.—A.W.P.

The Divine Covenants.

4. *The Abrahamic.*

In the last two months' articles upon this most interesting subject we sought to establish the basic fact that the promises of God to Abraham were never made to his natural descendants, but rather to his *spiritual* "seed," that is, to those possessing a like faith with his; consequently, the *unbelieving* posterity of Jacob were as much excluded from the spiritual blessings of the covenant as were the offspring of Ishmael and Esau. Then we sought to show, by an appeal to Romans 4:13-16, Galatians 3:16-18, 29; Hebrews 11:9-16 that *all* who belong to Christ have a joint-heritage with Abraham. At the close of last month's paper we endeavoured to dispose of the objection that the inheritance promised to Abraham was merely an "earthly" one. Before proceeding further, we make a suggestive quotation from the writings of Robert Haldane.

"The land of Canaan was a type of the heavenly country. It was the inheritance given by promise to Abraham and his posterity: as his descendants after the flesh inherited the one, so his spiritual seed shall inherit the other. Canaan was the land of rest, after the toils and dangers of the wilderness. To make it a fit inheritance, and an emblem of that inheritance which is undefiled, and into which there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, it was cleared of the ungodly inhabitants. As the introduction of the people of Israel into that land was not effected by their own power or efforts (Josh. 24:12, Psa. 44:4), but by the unmerited goodness and power of God; so the children of God do not obtain possession of the heavenly inheritance by their own power or efforts, but by the free grace and power of God (Rom. 9:16). As those who believed not were excluded from Canaan, so all unbelievers will be excluded from Heaven. As Moses could not lead the people of Israel into Canaan, that honour being reserved for Joshua, so it is not by the law that the people of God shall enter Heaven, but by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the true Joshua. No other country on earth could have been selected as a fitter emblem of Heaven: it is called in Scripture 'the pleasant land,' 'the glory of all lands,' 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

Not only was Palestine a striking and beautiful type of Heaven, but the promise of the heavenly Canaan was couched under the promise of the earthly Canaan. The patriarchs themselves so understood it, as is abundantly evident from Hebrews 11. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed" (v. 8): that "place" which he was to afterward receive "for an inheritance" could not be the earthly Canaan, for we are distinctly told that God "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5), and in the absence of any scriptural statement to that effect, it would seem most incongruous to suppose that after spending four thousand years in Heaven, the patriarch, after the resurrection, will again reside upon earth. No, his hope concerned a "Heavenly County" (Heb. 11:14, 16), yet no promise concerning *it* is found anywhere in the Old Testament, unless it be the real kernel inside the promise of the earthly Canaan. That *our* "hope" is the same as Abraham's is clear from Hebrews 6:17-19.

In addition to the two great promises which our patriarch received, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed and the inheritance be secured to them, was the still greater and yet more comprehensive assurance "to be a *God* unto thee, and to thy seed after thee . . . I will be their *God*" (Gen. 17:7, 8). This Divine declaration was designed to make known the infinitely condescending relation which Jehovah meant to sus-

tain to His believing people, and to encourage them in the exercise of strong confidence in Him. It was a new revelation to Abraham of the gracious intercourse which He would maintain with them, for so far as Scripture records no similar word has been given to any of the saints which preceded. Here, then, was a further and fuller unfolding of the Divine communications under the Abrahamic Covenant, a distinct advance upon what had been previously revealed.

When the Most High promises to be a *God* unto any, it is in effect declaring that He takes them into His favour and under His protection; that *He* will be their portion, and that there is nothing good—with a wise respect to their welfare—which He will withhold from them. All there is of evil which needs to be averted, all there is of real good that can suitably be bestowed, is included in this grand assurance. Our finite minds are incapable of defining the capacity of God to bless, or to adequately comprehend all that such a statement includes. Its application is not limited to this life only, but also looks forward to the never-ending ages of eternity. The great Jehovah is solemnly pledged to guide, guard, glorify His covenant people: “*my God* shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Now each of the promises to Abraham received a *double* fulfillment: a “letter” and a “spirit,” or as we prefer to designate them, a carnal and a spiritual. “Thou shalt be a father of many nations . . . and kings shall come out of thee” (Gen. 17:4, 6). In addition to the Israelites, Abraham was the father of the Ishmaelites and the various children of Keturah (Gen. 25:1, 2). But these were all born after the flesh (Gal. 4:23), and were only a figure of the real seed, the spiritual. This is clear from, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure *to all the seed*; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is *the father of us all*—As it is written, I have made thee *a father of many nations*” (Rom. 4:16, 17). Thus, in the truest and highest sense Abraham was the father of *believers*, whether Jews or Gentiles, and of them *only*. In John 8:39 and 44 Christ emphatically denied that Abraham was the “father” of the unbelieving Jews of His day.

“And I will establish My *covenant* between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:7). The making good of this was adumbrated when Israel after the flesh was taken into covenant by Jehovah at Sinai, whereby He formally became their God and acknowledged them as His people: Exodus 19:5, 6; Leviticus 26:12, etc. But the actual and ultimate accomplishment of Genesis 17:7 is in connection with the spiritual Israel, Abraham’s children by faith, and this by a “better covenant”: for with the true house of Israel He says, “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:10, 12).

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, *the land* wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8). Israel’s conquest and occupation of the earthly Canaan in the days of Joshua was the figurative and lower fulfillment of this promise. As we have already shown, its spiritual realisation lies in the possession of the “better Country” which those who are of the faith of Abraham shall eternally inherit. Thus it was that the patriarchs themselves understood this promise, as is unmistakably evident from Hebrews 11:9-16: their faith was more especially directed to the “*Heavenly Country*,” of which the earthly was but an emblem.

The same truth was brought out clearly in our Lord's reasoning with the Sadducees, who denied all that was spiritual. "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Luke 20:37): the covenant-promises taught the patriarchs that their resurrection and glorification was necessary to the fulfillment of them. That the "Canaan" in which they were to dwell after the resurrection was to be, not on earth, but in Heaven, is equally plain from the previous part of this same conversation of Christ: "The children of *this* world (the earthly Canaan in which the Sadducees then were) marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain *that* world, (the heavenly Canaan) and the resurrection from the dead, (to prepare them for it) neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels" (vv. 34-36).

The Apostle Paul gave an exposition of the covenant-promises in perfect accord with that which we have just considered from the lips of the Lord Jesus. In His defence before King Agrippa, he hesitated not to say, and that in the presence of the Jewish leaders, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6, 7). And *what* was that "promise"? Their unimpeded and happy enjoyment of the land of Palestine? No indeed, but "why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should *raise the dead*?" (v. 8). So also, when before Felix, he declared "I confess unto thee, that after the way which they (the unbelieving Jews) call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written *in the Law* and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be *a resurrection of the dead*, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:14, 15).

But where is the promise made unto the fathers of the resurrection from the dead "written *in the Law*"? The answer is, nowhere, unless it be *in the covenant-promises* made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob; nor is it there, except in the sense in which they have now been explained. God will raise from the dead all the *spiritual* seed of Abraham, and will give them "for an everlasting possession" that Canaan above, of which the Canaan on earth was the appointed emblem and shadow. Rightly did James Haldane point out that "One great means by which Satan has succeeded in corrupting the Gospel, has been the blending (we may add "the confusing") of the literal and spiritual fulfillment of these promises—thus confounding the old and new covenants. This is seen in the attempts made to apply to the carnal 'seed' of believers (Christians) the promises made to the spiritual 'seed of Abraham.'"

We are not unmindful that some of our readers are likely to object strongly to what they would term this "spiritualizing" method of interpreting the Scriptures. But let it be pointed out that this giving to the covenant-promises both a "letter" and "spirit" significance is not a theory formed to serve a purpose: it is in keeping with and required by every part of the Old Testament dispensation, wherein the things of earth were employed to shadow forth heavenly realities, types pointing forward to antitypes. Take for example the temple: it was "the house of God" in the letter, but Christ and His Church is so in the spirit. To now call any earthly building "the House of God" is as far below the sense which that expression bears when it is applied to the Church of Christ, as calling the *nation* of Israel the "people of God" was far below the meaning of that phrase when applied

to the *spiritual* Israel (Gal. 6:16).

Things are said of the house of God in the letter which only fully suit the spirit. Solomon declared "I have surely built Thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever" (1 Kings 8:13). Now the incongruity of supposing that *He* whom "the heaven of heavens cannot contain" should dwell in any earthly and material house forever, as "a settled habitation," is only removed by referring it to the spirit. Christ's body (personal and mystical) is the only "temple" (John 2:19, 21; Eph. 2:18-22) of which this is fully true. This is not open to argument: God *did not* "dwell forever" in the temple built by Solomon, for it was destroyed thousands of years ago; but in His *spiritual* "temple" it is accomplished to its utmost extent. According to the same principle must the covenant-promises be interpreted: the temporal things promised therein being but images of those "better things" which God promised to bestow upon Abraham's believing children.

Reviewing the ground now covered let us point out that the first great purpose of the covenant was to make known *the stock* from which the Messiah was to spring. Second, this covenant revealed that God's ultimate design was the *worldwide* diffusion of the benefits it announced. Before Nimrod, the whole race was as one language and had an easy intercourse with each other. But upon the confusion of tongues, they were divided and scattered abroad, and were all alike fast falling into a state of confirmed defection from God. When Abraham was called, and his family selected as a people to whom God was to communicate a knowledge of His will, and attach (by sovereign grace) to His service, it would be natural to infer that the rest of the nations were totally and finally abandoned to their own evil devices, and that only the one favoured nation would participate in the triumphs of the future Deliverer. It is instructive to note how this logical but erroneous conclusion was anticipated by God from the beginning, and refuted by the very terms of the covenant which He made with Abraham.

The patriarch and his descendants were indeed set apart from all others; peculiar privileges and blessings of the highest value were conferred upon them; but at the very conferring of them the Lord gave an express intimation that those privileges were confined to them *in trust*, and that the Israelitish theocracy was only a *temporary* arrangement, for in Abraham would "*all families of the earth be blessed.*" Thus clear announcement was made that the time would come when the middle wall of partition would be broken down and all restrictions removed, and the blessings of Abraham be extended to a far wider circle. The *external* arrangements of the covenant were simply a necessity for a time, with the object of securing grander and more comprehensive results. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18) was a definite publication of the *international* scope of the Divine mercy.

Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant, taken as a whole, not only defined the particular line from which the Messiah was to spring, announced the needful (temporal) arrangements in preparation for His appearing, and the extent to which His glorious work was destined to reach; but it placed in a clearer light the relation which (in consequence of it) God condescended to sustain to His redeemed people; and it supplied a striking intimation and typification of the *nature of* the blessings, which, in virtue of that relation, He designed to confer upon them. It was a wonderful enlargement of revelation; it was the Gospel in figure, and is so regarded in the New Testament (John 8:56, Gal. 3:8). The Apostle Paul refers to the Abrahamic Covenant again and again as foreshadowing and illustrating the

privileges bestowed upon Christians, and of the principle on which those privileges are conferred—a faith which is evidenced by obedience.—A.W.P.

Union and Communion.

7. Practical.

What is Divine “salvation”? It is a rescuing or deliverance. From what? From the penalty, power, and presence of sin. How is it effected? By the joint-operations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May a real Christian regard himself as a “saved” person? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. What do you mean? This, that God’s salvation is presented to us in Scripture under three tenses, past, present, and future. There is a real sense in which every Christian has already been saved; there is a real sense in which every Christian is now being saved; and there is a real sense in which the salvation of every Christian on earth is yet future. Every Christian on earth has been saved from the penalty of sin, because Christ suffered it in his stead. But the sinful nature is left within, and though its complete dominion over us has been broken, it is still active and operative, and from its power and defiling effects we need saving.

Now the design of God in saving His people is to recover them from the Fall, to deliver them from its effects, to restore them to their state of happy fellowship with Him. It is true, blessedly true, that the redeemed gain far more through the last Adam than they lost by the first Adam; yet that in nowise conflicts with what we have said in the preceding sentence—the surpassing gain through Christ will come before us (D.V.) in the final article of this series. Before the Fall, we, in Adam, were in blissful communion with God: our nature was in tune with His, our joy lay in a ready responsiveness to His will. God and man were then of one accord, each finding delight in the other, yet the difference between the Creator and the creature being suitably sustained by the relation which was appointed—that of Sovereign and subject.

Only as Sovereign and subject could God and man maintain their relative positions: there must be the exercise of *authority* on the part of the former, and of *submission* on the part of the latter: thereby there was a mutual indwelling of the one and the other—God ruling, man obeying. Such mutual indwelling and concord would daily become more intimate and confident: man increasingly perceiving the exceeding excellency of the commandments he was keeping (and of Him whose nature and will those commandments discovered), and God having increasing delight in the growing intelligence and love by which His subject obeyed. Thus at the beginning, holiness and happiness were made inseparable in the experience of the creature: holiness in walking in complete subjection to his Maker’s revealed will, happiness in the joyous fellowship which this secured. Thus, too, were the relative positions and relations of Creator and creature perfectly sustained.

But alas, sin entered: entered by Eve’s entertaining the Serpent’s suggestion that God’s restraints were tyrannical and irksome, and freedom from them being greatly to be desired; culminating in the overt act of rebellious disobedience. In consequence thereof a breach was made: harmony no longer existed between God and man; and happy fellowship which already obtained was broken. Henceforth, God and disobedient man must dwell apart; so Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise. Outside paradise *away from God*, were all their descendants born: “afar off” (Eph. 2:17) are the awful words written over the brow of all the first Adam’s offspring, “*alienated from the life of God*” (Eph. 4:18). “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. 51:5) is true of all alike; and because this is so “the wicked are *estranged from the womb*” (Psa. 58:3).

How this terrible situation is counteracted by God in the saving of His people we

have endeavoured to show in the preceding articles of this series. Christ was made their Head, and their redemption was entrusted to Him: a union was established between them. First, a mystical union, when they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Second, a federal union, whereby Christ should act as their Representative and Surety. Third, a vital union: by the incarnation, when He assumed their nature; and by regeneration, when they became partakers of His nature. Fourth, a saving union, when the soul (previously quickened) exercises faith, lays hold of and cleaves unto Christ. Then is it that the trusting sinner enters into the legal benefits which the Saviour's atonement secured for him: "By Him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). Saving union is the personal acceptance of Christ on His own terms: the penitent heart now rests upon Christ as an all-sufficient sacrifice for all his sins.

A new relation has been entered into by the believer which radically changes the course of his life, and which is to regulate all of his future conduct. He is no longer his own: he has given himself to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5); henceforth to please and honour Him must be his paramount concern. As the wedding, when the knot is tied, is but the beginning of married life, so the soul's surrender to and acceptance of Christ as Lord, is but the commencement of the Christian life. As the bride has turned her back upon all other lovers and solemnly vowed to be faithful to and obey her husband in all things, so the believer has disowned all other lords and promised to be in subjection to Christ alone (Isa. 26:13). As the purpose of marriage is the production of offspring, so we read, "ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be *married* to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should *bring forth fruit* unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

Marriage, then, is a new beginning, the entering into a new order of things, the starting point of a *fresh life*. Before her marriage the woman, perhaps, was alone in the world; without father or brothers to defend her. She had to look after herself and plan her own career and course. But now she has taken upon her the marriage-yoke: she has given herself up to the one who loves her more dearly than any other creature, to the one who has won her heart, and who has now assumed the sole responsibility of being her provider and protector. It is now *for her good* to meekly submit to her husband's loving rule (1 Peter 3:1-6), to seek and promote his interests, to adorn the home he has made for her. His will is supreme; her good is his concern; and it is her welfare to act in submission to his wishes. Such is the ideal of married life: on the one hand, love's authority maintained by the head of the home; on the other, love's obedience joyously rendered by the dutiful and devoted wife—a shadowing forth of the relation which exists between the Redeemer and His redeemed, and the new order of things into which the saved soul enters.

Marriage is a means to an end, the making possible of wedded union, with its responsibilities and privileges, its duties, and joys. In like manner, saving union with Christ is a means to an end, the making possible of *the Christian life*, which is to *evidence* the new relationship that has been entered into. In other words, just as the vital union between Christ and the Christian (effected by the Spirit at the new birth) capacitates the soul for a saving union with Christ (accomplished by believing in Him), so that saving union, in turn, makes way for a *practical union* with Him. Thus, at the very outset, the Lord Jesus says to the sin-weary and conscience-burdened sinner who comes to Him for relief, "Take My *yoke* upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"! (Matt. 11:29). Now a "yoke" is that which harnesses two

oxen, that they may walk and work *together*, and the Lord employed this figure to denote the relation now obtaining between Himself and His people.

In last month's article we pointed out that one of the main characteristics which distinguishes the saving from the vital union is, that in the latter the soul is *active*, whereas in the former the soul was *passive*. That is to say, in regeneration something was wrought *in us*, but in connection with salvation something is required *of us*, namely, our voluntary act of surrendering to, laying hold of, and cleaving unto Christ. So is it in connection with the *practical* union which exists between the Saviour and the saved: He does not place the yoke upon us, but says "*Take My yoke upon you.*" It is a voluntary and conscious act upon *our* part. The figure is a very plain one. Previously the ox roamed at large in the fields, but now it is no longer free to please itself—it is subservient to the will of its owner and master. The "yoke," then, speaks of *subjection*, and thus it is with the believer: he has yielded himself to the claims of Christ, bowed to His Lordship, and entered into the place of submission, to be directed and used of Him.

But, alas, we now witness very little in actual realization of what we have said above, either in the natural or the spiritual sphere. The "yoke" is looked upon as something which is objectionable. Our lot is cast in a day when the spirit of lawlessness is rife on every hand, when any restraints are regarded as irksome and repellent. The equality of the sexes, the woman's rights, the repudiation of the man's headship, is being proclaimed in almost every quarter. The modern wife is "willing to be led" (providing the leading suits her whims), but refuses to be ruled; the idea of meekly *obeying* her husband is altogether foreign to her disposition and ideas. And, my readers, *that* is only an adumbration on the lower plane of what now obtains so widely in the religious sphere. Multitudes profess to be resting on the finished work of Christ, but they *refuse* His "yoke"; they want to be saved from Hell, but they do not want His commandments; and the two cannot be separated.

In days gone by preachers frequently made it plain that "No cross, no crown"; alas, the pulpit is now pandering to a self-indulging generation. But God has not changed, nor has He lowered the claims of His holiness. Christ *must be followed* if ever we are to arrive at the Place where He has gone; and to "follow" Christ is to take upon us *His* "yoke"—to enter the same position of servitude and subjection which He did. Christ "pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15:3), and His imperative word is, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Christ lived in full submission to the revealed will of God, and He left us an "example" that we should "follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). We must "suffer *with Him*" if ever we are to be "glorified *together*" (Rom. 8:17).

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Here again is brought before us the *practical* union which exists between Christ and His people. If there is to be true fellowship there must first be harmony, oneness of accord in mind and will. All real communion is based upon union, and as the "*walk together*" intimates, it is not the vital or the saving union which is there in view, but the practical—the actual living out of the Christian life. And the Christian life (alas that the life of the average Christian falls so far short) is summed up in one word: "For to me to live *is Christ*" (Phil. 1:21). But Christ is holy, and He will not walk with us in any of the by-paths of unrighteousness: "For what fellowship hath Righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath Light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15).

Just as the ideal married life can only be maintained by the exercise of love's authority on the one hand and love's obedience on the other, so it is in the Christian life. "If ye love Me," says Christ, "keep My commandments" (John 14:15). *Obedience* is not only the prime condition of practical union and communion with Christ, but it is of its very essence, for only thus is restored the relation which existed between God and His creature before sin entered—love's rule and love's submission. Before the Fall there was perfect complacency on both sides, Creator and creature dwelling in each other with unalloyed satisfaction, as the "very good" of Genesis 1:31 clearly denotes. Yet that mutual indwelling of God in man and man in God was *not procured* by man's keeping God's commandments, rather was that the channel of its outgoing and conscious realization; and only thus could they maintain their relative positions of Sovereign and servant.

We repeat what was said in an earlier paragraph: the grand design in salvation is to bring us back again into communion with God in Christ: not merely into a nominal communion, but into a real, intelligent, and joyous one. But "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"—walk together in a way of holy and spiritual fellowship? No indeed, for *that* we must be of one mind and will with Christ Himself. For *that* we must receive His commandments into our hearts, be well-pleased with them, and live under their controlling influence. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we *walk in the light*, as He is in the light, *we have fellowship* one with another" (1 John 1:5-7).

"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21-23). Having "*turned unto the Lord*" these young converts were now exhorted to "*cleave unto the Lord*": that is, since a saving union with Christ had been effected, they were bidden to "with purpose of heart" maintain a practical union and communion with Him. To "cleave unto the Lord" is to live a life of dependence upon and devotedness unto Him: having "come" to Him, they are now to diligently "follow" Him, or "to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Only by the continued exercise of faith, a bold profession of His name, and obedience to His commands, can we "follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea. 6:3).

Practical union with Christ consists in the exercise of *obedience*, and that is impossible till there has been a saving union. The only kind of obedience which is acceptable to God is evangelical obedience, that is "the obedience *of faith*" (Rom. 16:26)—an obedience which springs from faith, which is animated by faith. There can be no true obedience before faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6), and therefore without faith it is impossible to obey Him. Faith is (from our side) the bond of union which unites with Christ, and obedience is the fruit of that believing union: see Romans 7:4 again—all "fruit" before marriage is bastard. Our persons must first be accepted in Christ before our services can be pleasing to God. All the good works recorded in Hebrews 11 were the fruits or obedience of faith.

Though inseparably connected, faith and obedience are quite distinct. Faith is the principle, obedience is the product; faith is the cause, obedience is the effect; faith is the root, obedience is the fruit. By faith we receive and own Christ as our rightful Lord; by obedience we regulate our conduct according to His commands. By faith a saving union with

Christ is effected, by obedience a practical union with Him is maintained. "He that hath My commandments and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21): Christ only *manifests* Himself in the intimacies of His love to those who are treading the path of obedience. A striking illustration of this is seen by a comparison of Genesis 18 and 19: "*the LORD* appeared unto" Abraham (Gen. 18:1) accompanied by two angels, manifesting Himself in human form. But only the "two angels" came to Lot (Gen. 19:1), who was not walking in practical union with the Lord. O how much we miss by allowing self-will to dominate and regulate us.

There is another spiritual grace which is inseparably connected with faith: "Faith which *worketh by love*" (Gal. 5:6). The reality and sincerity of faith is only evidenced by the presence and operations of love. Faith is the hand which works, but love is the power that moves it. Faith is the feet walking, but love is the energy that stirs them into action; hence we find the Psalmist declaring, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt *enlarge my heart*" (119:32). Now as there can be no saving union with Christ without faith, so there can be no practical union with Him without love. Love must be answered by love: "My son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26) is our loving Lord's call. Love is the mainspring in the soul which moves every faculty and grace, and therefore is love denominated "*the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10).

True repentance also flows from love. The warmer our love to God, the stronger will be our hatred of sin, as contrary to Him. The sweeter the fellowship of Christ to our hearts, the more bitter the realization of our offenses against Him. This is that "*godly sorrow*" which worketh repentance to salvation "not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10): it is a sorrow issuing from a heart that truly loves the Lord, and which is grieved for having displeased and dishonoured Him. Love mourns the breaking of fellowship and the hiding of the Lord's countenance. Then it is that the agonized soul cries, "The Enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. I remember the days of old . . . I stretch forth my hands unto Thee: my soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit" (Psa. 143:3-7).

In what has been said above we have sought to indicate the relation between the saving and the practical union between the believer and Christ; what practical union actually consists of, and how it is to be restored when broken—by true repentance and humble confession. As this branch of our subject is so much neglected today, as it so intimately concerns the glory of Christ, and the wellbeing of our souls, a further article thereon seems called for.—A.W.P.

Divine Comfort.

Below is the editor's first sermon in Glasgow; preached December 22, 1935, on what the world calls "Christmas Sunday."

The Lord has given me two texts for tonight: the second one I will announce near the end. The first is "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Whatever bearing the Beatitudes may yet have upon a future godly remnant of the Jews, their present application is obvious and simple: they supply a Divine description of those who are the subjects and citizens of Christ's spiritual kingdom. To me it appears the Beatitudes are *eight* in number (the last being a double one), which speaks of a *new beginning*, for only those *renewed* by the Holy Spirit possess the character here delineated. Thus I regard these Beatitudes as supplying us with a moral portrait of those who have been born again, and with its several features we should honestly and diligently compare our hearts and lives. It is on the second of them I feel led to speak tonight.

"Blessed are they that *mourn*: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Now it is obvious that Christ does not here refer to *every* species of "mourning." There are thousands of mourners in the world tonight who are not included within our text; those mourning over blighted hopes, over financial reverses, over the loss of loved ones. But, alas, so far from many of them coming beneath this Divine benediction, they are under God's condemnation; nor is there any promise or guarantee that they shall ever be Divinely "comforted." There are three kinds of "mourning" referred to in the Scriptures: a *natural*, such as I have just described; a *sinful*, which is disconsolate and inordinate grief, refusing to be comforted, or a hopeless remorse like that of Judas; and a *gracious*, a "godly sorrow," of which the Holy Spirit is the Author.

The "mourning" of our text is a *spiritual* one. The previous verse indicates the line of thought here: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yes, "blessed are the poor," not the poor in purse, but the poor in heart: those who realise themselves to be spiritual bankrupts in themselves, paupers before God. That felt poverty of spirit is the very opposite of the Laodiceanism which is so rife today, that self-complacency which says "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." So it is spiritual mourning here. Furthermore, *these* "mourners" Christ pronounced "blessed." They are so because the Spirit of God has wrought a work of grace in them, and hence they have been awakened to see and feel their lost condition. They are "blessed" because God does not leave them at that point: "they shall be comforted."

Now it has to be acknowledged that my text brings before us an aspect of Truth which is not very popular today. In this age people had much rather hear about that which is bright and cheerful, than what is somber and doleful. The Gospel is far more acceptable than the Law. People had rather hear about Christ than that which, under the Spirit, is calculated to reveal to them their deep need of Christ. Nevertheless our text raises a most important question, which I feel led to press on your hearts, and on my own: Do *I* really belong to the class which Christ here pronounces "Blessed," for observe it is a *class*, as the plural pronoun denotes: not "blessed is he," but "*they* that mourn."

But why raise such a question here? Are not the majority of *us* professing Christians? Do we not believe firmly that the Scriptures are the Word of God? are we not "resting on the finished work of Christ"? are we not rejoicing in the assurance that our sins are forgiven? Ah, may I remind you of the Lord's parable of the sower. Of the stony-ground hearer He declared, "he received the Word," and received it "with *joy*"; yet, of him Christ

solemnly affirmed “yet hath he not root in himself” (Matt. 13:21). And it is greatly to be feared there are many such today in orthodox circles of Christendom: the product of a superficial “evangelism,” which is so eager to secure quick and visible “results”—their conversion *was not* preceded by conviction and contrition.

There is a class which come to the great Physician, though they do not feel themselves to be desperately and deadly sick. They have a certain kind of “faith”—I dare not call it a saving faith—but it is not preceded by repentance! They apparently feed on the Lamb, but there is no “bitter herbs” (Exo. 12:8). There is a “joy,” but it is not one which follows a deep sorrow. There is a “comfort” experienced, yet there is no previous “mourning.” But my dear friends, what is *the Divine order*? Is there not a stripping before clothing, a wounding before healing, an abasing before exalting? Must not the ground of the hard heart be *plowed* before the good Seed can enter and take root? They that are whole—in their own estimation and feelings—need not a physician, but they that are sick. How was it with Israel in Egypt—the greatest of the Old Testament types of salvation. Were not the Hebrews sorely afflicted, groaning and crying out in deep distress, *before* God sent them a deliverer?

Turn with me now to the following Scriptures, and note carefully the *order of Truth* presented in them. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5). “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psa. 126:5). “The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy” (Prov. 14:10). “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3). The same order is also observable in the New Testament: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). “Having received the Word *in much affliction* (did you so “receive” it?), with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6). “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). So it is in our text: the “mourning” *precedes* the “comfort.” Therefore I press upon you, and upon myself, am I among this class of spiritual “mourners”?

The pressing importance of this question appears when we thoughtfully observe that Christ pronounces those in this class “blessed”: the Divine benediction rests upon them. Do you know *what* it is which rests upon those who *do not* belong to this class? The Divine *condemnation*! There is no middle ground, no third class: it is one or the other. You may remember that after Israel crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan, certain ones were required to stand upon mount Gerizim and pronounce upon the obedient the *blessings* of God; while others were to stand upon mount Ebal and pronounce upon the disobedient the *curses* of God (Deut. 27:12, 13). So again in Matthew 25, unto the sheep Christ says, “Come ye *blessed* of My Father” (v. 34); whereas to the goats He says, “Depart from Me ye *cursed*” (v. 41). If, then, we really value our souls, if we are truly concerned as to where we shall spend eternity, it behooves us to seriously examine our hearts and make sure of *which class we belong to*.

“Blessed are they that *mourn*.” The first reference is to that initial “mourning” which ever precedes a genuine conversion. Do not misunderstand me: I am not arguing for any stereotyped experience, for any definitely defined *depth* of sorrow or any *protracted* season of grief. But I do insist (as Scripture does) that repentance *precedes* forgiveness; that there must be a real sense of sin *before* the Remedy for it will even be desired. Thousands acknowledge they are sinners, who have never *mourned* over the fact. Take the woman of

Luke 7, who washed the Saviour's feet with her tears: have you ever shed any over *your* sins? Take the prodigal in Luke 15: *before* he left the far country he said, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son" (vv. 18, 19): ah, where shall we find those today with this sense of their sinnership? Take the publican of Luke 18: why did he "smite upon his *breast*" and say "God be merciful to me, a sinner"? (v. 13). Because he felt the plague of his own heart. So of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost: they were "pricked in the heart, and cried out"!

This "mourning" springs from a sense of sin, from a tender conscience, from a broken heart. It is a godly sorrow over rebellion against God and hostility to His will. In some cases it is a grief over the very morality in which the heart has trusted, over the self-righteousness which has caused such complacency. This "mourning" is the agonizing realisation that it was *my* sins which nailed to the cross the Lord of Glory. When Israel shall see Christ "they shall *mourn* for Him" (Zech. 12:10). So it is now when, by the power of the Spirit, the contrite sinner sees Christ by faith. And it is *such* tears and groans which prepare the heart to truly welcome and receive the "balm of Gilead," the comfort of the Gospel.

But our text is by no means to be confined unto the initial experience of conviction and contrition, for observe the tense of the verb: it is not "have mourned," but "mourn"—a present and continual experience. The Christian himself has much to *mourn* over. The sins which he now commits—both of omission and commission are a sense of daily grief to him, or should be so, and *will be* if his conscience is tender. An ever-deepening discovery of the depravity of his nature, the plague of his heart, the sea of corruption within, ever polluting all that he does, deeply exercises him. Consciousness of the surgings of unbelief, the swellings of pride, the coldness of his love, and his paucity of fruit, make him cry "O wretched man that I am." An humbling recollection of past offences: "wherefore remember, that ye being *in time past*" (Eph. 2:11).

Yes, "Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves *groan* within ourselves" (Rom. 8:23). Does not the Christian groan when under the disciplining rod of the Father: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but *grievous*" (Heb. 12:11). And is he not deeply pained by the awful dishonour now done to the Lord Jesus on every side. But blessed be God it is written, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that *sigh and that cry* for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezek. 9:4). So too there is a sympathetic mourning over the sorrows of others: "Weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

And these holy mourners Christ pronounced "Blessed." This is at complete variance with the world's ideas. In all ages and climes men have deemed the prosperous and the light-hearted the happy ones, but He who spake as never man spake, declared "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are they that mourn." And *why* are these mourners "blessed"? First, because such mourning proves they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who maketh intercession for them "with *groanings* which cannot be uttered." Second, because this holy mourning brings them into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ: when here He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Third, because they shall be Divinely "comforted."

Learn, then, from what has been before us, the folly of measuring the *helpfulness* of

the books we read or the preaching we hear by the degree of peace and joy which it imparts to our hearts. Ah, the truth is, dear friends, that sometimes the address which is of most help and blessing, is the one which causes us to get alone with God and weep before Him! Our souls are by no means always in a fit condition to be regaled by the sweets of the Gospel. When we have flirted with the world, or indulged the lusts of the flesh, the *Holy Spirit* gives us a rebuke or admonition!

“For they shall be *comforted*.” There is a threefold reference here. First, to the initial “comfort” which immediately follows a sound conversion (one that is preceded by conviction and contrition), namely, the removal of that conscious guilt which lies as an intolerable load on the conscience. Then it is Christ says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Note that there again we have presupposed one who feels sin to be a “burden” *before* he comes to Christ—that is what propels him to Christ for relief. Then it is Christ gives rest to the sin-weary heart. Then it is the Holy Spirit applies the comfort of the Gospel to the stricken soul: it is the realisation of free and full forgiveness by the blood of Christ.

Second, there is continual “comforting” of the “mourning” saint by the Holy spirit, who is the Comforter. The one who mourns over his departures from Christ is comforted by the assurance that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The one who mourns under the chastening rod of God is comforted by the promise, “afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). The one who mourns over the awful dishonour done to his Lord in the religious world, is comforted by the fact that Satan’s time is now short, and soon Christ will bruise him beneath His feet.

Third, the final “comfort” is when we leave this world and have done with sin forever. Then shall “sorrow and sighing flee away.” To the rich man in Hell, Abraham said of the one who had begged at the gate, “Now he is *comforted*” (Luke 16:25). The best wine is reserved for the last. The “comfort” of Heaven will more than compensate for all the “mourning” of earth.

The second text is “Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25). What a solemn commentary are these words of the Lord on the festivities of *this* week: indulging the lusts of the flesh under the pretence of keeping Christ-mass! O the unholy mirth and jollification of the world, with the sacred name of Christ tacked over it all! It is nothing but paganism perpetuated by Rome: alas that so many professing Christians should adopt it. “A merry Christmas”—carnal indulgence over the memory of the unwanted Son of God lying in a manger!

“Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.” This is a joy that is fleshly, the pleasures of sin for a season: unto such applies “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (James 4:9). There is the less need for me to speak at length on this second text, because it enunciates identically the same truth as the first, only it gives the reverse side. “Woe unto you that laugh now.” I need hardly say that the “laughter” here is not to be confined to the exercise of the facial muscles: it is a *state of heart* which the Lord is here reprehending. It is an indifference to God’s demands, an unconcern about the claims of Christ, a thinking only about enjoying the things of time and sense. Eternal concerns are deliberately shelved: the paramount interests of the soul are ignored. Sin is regarded lightly: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18).

“Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.” Such “laugh” (though they may be too well bred to do so outwardly) at the warnings of Christian friends, considering them as “kill-joys” or fanatics. They “laugh” at the solemn truth of eternal punishment, supposing it to be a bogey with which to frighten ignorant people. And so they go giddily and gaily along the broad road which leadeth to destruction—”laughing” while hastening to a hopeless eternity! How solemn is that word of God’s “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Prov. 1:26)!

Now dear friends, I have sought to hold up these texts as a mirror in which we may see ourselves, and ascertain *to which* of the two classes we belong. The class of spiritual “mourners” Christ declares *blessed*: the class of carnal “laughers,” is the one upon which He pronounces His solemn *woe*. The Lord graciously grant that in HIS light, we may “see light,” and clearly perceive to which of these diverse companies *we* really belong.—
A.W.P.

Ministerial Address to the Unconverted.

Sir,—In a late conversation you desired my thoughts concerning a Scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided; and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the Word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due measure, the doctrines of either the Law or the Gospel. And they apprehend that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had laboured to establish in the course of their sermon.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents; and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, *to warn them*, by His tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached Gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honoured with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address; while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labours have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than adding to their number. Now, as “he that winneth souls is wise,” and as every faithful labourer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favour of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel, endeavour, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and intreat and warn them to consider “How they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation.” For it is not easy to conceive that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favour of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the Truth, and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they fur-

nish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of His authorised ministers, the Apostles, are both *our rule and our warrant*. The Lord Jesus was the great Preacher of free grace, “who spake as never man spake”; and His ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared that none would come unto Him, unless drawn and taught of God: John 6:44-46. And yet He often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be *His*, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal: John 6:27, Luke 13:24-27, John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not of His disciples, but to the multitude. The Apostles copied from their Lord: they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that “it is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy”; yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that *before* they had given evident signs that they were pricked in the heart as Acts 2:21) to “repent” and turn from their vanities to the living God: Acts 3:19, 14:15, 17:30. Peter’s advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point: for though he perceived him to be “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity,” he *exhorted* him “to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven.” It may be presumed that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our readers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the Apostle’s example.

You have been told that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect His power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel in chapter 37 may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel ministry. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord’s question to the Prophet, “Can these dry bones live?” Our response, like that of the Prophet’s is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: “O Lord, Thou knowest, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for Thee to raise them unto life; therefore *we renounce our own reasonings*, and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at Thy bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is Thine, and to Thee be all the praise.” The dry bones could not hear the Prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived, but the word was spoken to them *considered as dry and dead*.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope He often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly *to them*, only the truths of the Gospel being declared in their hearing; but He who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave them condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which He often effects the purposes of His grace; though none of the means of grace by which He ordinarily works, can produce a real change in

the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of His Spirit. Should we admit that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, *extend too far*, even to prove the impropriety of *all* exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Christ, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, “to repent and do their first works”; yea, when we exhort believers “to walk worthy of God, who has called them to His kingdom and glory”: in each of these cases we press them to acts for which *they* have *no* inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the Word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavours can have no more effect in these instances than if we were to say to a dead body “arise, and walk.” For an exertion of Divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart; and only He who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning till night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord only can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel-promises, to seek to Him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do for them that which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said “him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out.” Perhaps it will not be easily proved that intreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner’s salvation from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavour to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of Scriptures constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of “consistency” may fetter our sentiments, and greatly *preclude* our usefulness. We need not wish to be more “consistent” *than the inspired writers*, nor be afraid of speaking as *they* have spoken before us! We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers *by nice reasonings* on the nature of human liberty, and the Divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions *are better avoided*. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects till we arrive in the world of Light. In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with His constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amuse you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your bowels yearn over poor sinners, you will

not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, John Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, which I recommend to your attentive consideration. I am etc., John Newton, 1770.

N.B. We heartily commend the above to the thoughtful and prayerful perusal of those of our ministerial brethren who are inclined to be hyper-Calvinistic. The above was written by one who was a marvelous trophy of sovereign grace, deeply taught in Divine things, wondrously helped in maintaining the *balance* of truth, and mightily used in the blessing of souls. Personally, we have often lamented the fact that Mr. Gadsby, and later, Mr. Philpot, followed (what we believe was the error of) William Huntington, instead of adhering to that path which had been almost uniformly trodden by the Reformers and Puritans. Had they done so, we believe that the Strict and Particular Baptist churches would be in a far healthier and livelier spiritual state than they are now in.—A.W.P.

Love to All the Saints.

How should I regard Christians who “follow not with us?” a young believer may ask. Well, how would that Great-Heart, the Apostle Paul, have regarded them? Are they not children of God? Hearts may agree although heads differ, and God sees grace where we see none. If you think that these people have less light than you, their need is a claim upon your help; and, believe it or not, they can teach *you* something! Be on your guard against viewing them with suspicion or contempt. You are made of exactly the same flesh and blood as they are, and the same grace is at work in them as in you. God loves persons rather than places.

You may not find every believer very approachable; but try to cultivate spiritual fellowship with *all* God’s people by dwelling upon the big things that all true Christians hold in common. In this way you will help to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Be a living link of fellowship between believers. Sympathy is better than criticism. Disbelieve those who have no faith in their fellow-Christians. Do not take the world’s side against God’s people.

Each group or school of thought has its own emphasis, and sometimes its own phraseology. Do not attach too much importance to pious phrase; the same truth can be expressed in different ways. We should learn to welcome *all* the truth, through whatever channel it may come to us. And the gifts of Christ are for *all* His people. (E. Adams).