

Vol. XXVI

March, 1947

No. 3

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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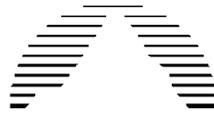
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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SPIRITUAL CONVERSE

“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6). What a noble faculty is speech! Man alone, of all the creatures of the earth, possesses it. Equally, with the power of reasoning, it is one of the things which set man high above the animals—for there is no comparison between the chatter of the ape, or the prattle of the parrot, and the articulated language of man. What an influential faculty is speech! What we say is capable of eternally affecting those who hear us, and therefore, the Bible ranks our words with our works. How often has the oratory of a single man swayed a whole nation! We know not how deeply impressed, helped, or injured another may be by a single utterance. Speech is capable of high and wide service. Man is never more majestic than when he speaks with dignity, authority, and power. Speech is indeed a blessed gift, but it is also a responsible charge. God will yet hold us to strict account for the use we make of our tongues: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mat 12:36-37). What an unspeakably solemn consideration is that!

While capable of producing much good, the tongue is also a power for much evil. This valuable gift from the Creator is frequently perverted, yea, generally put to an evil use. What guilt is acquired, what havoc is wrought, by profanity, by filthy talk, by slander, by angry and cruel utterances, by talebearing! How each of us needs to cry daily unto God, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psa 141:3). What a fearful amount of gossip or idle talk the children of God are guilty of! In early English, the word “gossip” was “God sip,” meaning *related to God*; but, alas, gossip is now far more akin to the Devil. How few there are who make conscience of engaging in our encouraging (by listening to it!) profitless conversation! Far better to be dumb and counted dull by our fellows, than to prostitute this faculty by pouring out a stream of empty and useless prattle which is worse than profitless, for “in the multitude of words there wanteth not *sin*: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (Pro 10:19). Even when an instructive and edifying subject of conversation *is* introduced, how quickly the average hearer seeks to turn it into a lower channel!

A person’s speech is a sure index to his character, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34). One does not have to pass condemnatory judgment upon his fellow when he listens to his vain and vulgar, or silly and senseless, chatter, for he plainly proclaims what he is by his own lips. “The mouth of fools poureth out foolishness” (Pro 15:2): water will not rise above its own level, neither will a foul well yield that which is fit to drink. “They are of the world: *therefore* speak they of the world, and the world heareth them” (1Jo 4:5). Then how many whitewashed or respectable worldlings are there in the “churches,” for their everyday talk is about little or nothing else than some phase of this world. As a man’s nature, so is his discourse. The portion of a natural man is a temporal one, and, as his interests are confined thereto, neither his aspirations, thoughts, or speech rise any higher. Where a man’s treasure is, there is his heart also; and since the treasure of the unregenerate be limited to the things of time and sense, and his heart is absorbed with them, his speech is about them.

The power of speech is a blessed privilege, but it entails a solemn responsibility. How am I, how are you, using this talent? Since it be a Divine gift, ought it not to be consecrated to God? Yet how few, even among His children, seem to realise it is both their duty and privilege to definitely dedicate their tongues unto the Lord. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). That is, your body as a whole and in all its parts: “Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your *members* as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13)—and one of the most important and influential of those members is the *tongue*! It is no longer your own, but “bought with a price” (1Co 6:20). Christians should be distinguished from non-Christians by their converse—as in everything else. Their calling (Heb 3:1), their citizenship (Phi 3:20), their inheritance (1Pe 1:4)—each is a heavenly one; and ought not their speech to be so too? “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life” (Pro 15:4), ministering refreshment, wholesome, and nourishing instruction unto others. Seek to make your converse spiritually profitable unto your fellows.

“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6), especially when conversing with God’s children. *That is how* we ought to employ our tongues, and how the Lord has bidden us to use them: our speech should be seasoned with true piety, savouring of heavenly things, elevating to the spiritual ear,

such as will be “edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29). Surely the one whose affections are set upon things above will find it a delight to speak about them to a responsive soul. If Christ be “the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:10) unto you, then must you not perforce extol Him? Perhaps you say, I would love to, but I do not possess the tongue of the learned. “Learning” is not necessary, nor are you called upon to address a learned congregation. But if the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, when you meet one of His own, will you not spontaneously speak of His excellency? It is indeed useless to turn on the tap if a barrel be empty, but if your heart be really occupied with the One who is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16), then out of the abundance of your heart, your mouth will speak.

Not that every Christian is competent to preach a whole sermon even to his most intimate friend, but he should, whenever he meets a member of the Household of Faith, be able to say something which will help and cheer him. It may be only the quoting of a single precept or promise, but often that means much to a fellow pilgrim who is discouraged and cast down by the difficulties of the way. “A word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Pro 15:23): yes, just a word, if it be prompted by the Holy Spirit. “A word fitly spoken [out of a compassionate heart and with grace] is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Pro 25:11)—like luscious oranges with their glistening leaves for background. Only the day to come will reveal how many a traveler on life’s highway went forth with renewed courage and strength after receiving an uplifting word from a humble Christian, as it will also reveal how many a golden opportunity we missed of uttering such a word! Of our Saviour, it is recorded, “Grace is poured into thy lips” (Psa 45:2); and even His enemies were obliged to admit, “Never man spake like this man” (Joh 7:46). Then seek to learn of Him and become more like Him.

If Christians be in a healthy state of soul, they should never be at a loss for matter of spiritual conversation when they meet one another. Then should each of them have occasion to say, “I will bless the LORD at all times: *his* praise shall continually be in my mouth...O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name *together*” (Psa 34:1, 3). Then will we be employing our tongues to good purpose. “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works...I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness...They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power” (Psa 145:5-7, 11). What themes suited to the lips of the redeemed are these! They are indeed appropriate subjects for spiritual converse which will edify one another. Instead of dwelling upon the evanescent trivialities which engage the thoughts of the unregenerate, exercise your mind and tongue upon those ineffable and eternal verities which the angels delight to contemplate. As you do so, the hearts of your hearers will burn within them, their souls will rejoice, and your Master will be magnified. Such spiritual converse is registered on high (Mal 3:16), for nothing concerning Christ can be lost or miss its reward.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

39. *Colossians 1:9-12, Part 3*

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10). Having already pointed out the relation of this petition and its dependence upon the former one, and having explained what we conceive to be the meaning of “walk worthy of the Lord,” we turn now to the next clause. Those added words, “unto all pleasing,” serve both to define and amplify the previous sentence, informing us *how* we are to walk worthily, and the *entirety* of that duty and privilege. We are to pray and strive to walk worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing. Not merely on the Sabbath, but every day; not simply comport ourselves reverently in the house of prayer, but conduct ourselves becomingly in the outside world. Our aim and endeavour must be to approve ourselves unto Christ, and please Him not only in those things which are esteemed by common consent, nor those which commend themselves unto and are agreeable to us, but also in those things which cross our wills and pinch the flesh. Nothing short of universal and uniform obedience is what is required from us. Christ died to deliver His people from the curse of the Law, but not from the duty of practising its precepts. He died, not to free His people from the service of God, but rather, that they might be enabled to serve Him acceptably and with peace of conscience and joy of heart.

There are but two classes of people in the world; namely, those who are offensive unto God, and those who are esteemed by Him—the one are self-pleasers; the other, self-deniers. Therein lies the essential difference between sincere souls and hypocrites: the former honestly endeavour to please Christ, and are regarded by Him as the excellent of the earth (Psa 16:3); the latter seek the approbation of men and life to gratify self, and therefore, are they unto God as “a vessel wherein is no pleasure” (Hos 8:8). There is no other alternative possible, but either living to please self or please the Lord. No matter what may be their pretensions, what name they go under, what be their creed, how highly regarded by their fellows, if self be their “God,” they are hateful unto the Holy One. Those in whom God delights are the ones who are regulated by His will, who live for His glory, whose daily walk honours Him, who are fruitful in good works. How that simple, but discriminating, classification serves to expose the empty profession all around us! Tens of thousands call themselves by the name of Christ, but they wear not His yoke, take not up their cross (the principle of self-abasement and sacrifice), follow not His example.

Unless we have fully given ourselves up to God and are genuinely seeking to please Him in all that we do, then our supposed conversion was merely a delusion. If the gratifying of our natural desires be our chief pleasure, we are yet in our sins. If we be sowing to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption. Make no mistake, dear reader, whoever you be: the Omniscient One cannot be imposed upon, neither will He accept a divided heart. No man can serve two masters. If you think to placate God by acting piously on the Sabbath, while thoroughly worldly through the week, then you are woefully mistaken. God will not be served with any reserve or limitation, but requires us to love Him with all our hearts, soul, and strength. In order to please Him, we have to shun whatever He hates: mortify the flesh, separate from the world, resist the Devil. The Lord will not be served with that which costs us nothing (2Sa 24:24). Those who detest such strictness and look upon puritans as idiots will discover in the day to come who were the ones that played the fool and trifled with their souls.

But is it possible that a mere creature of the earth, and a fallen and sinful one at that, can please the great and holy God? Certainly it is. Of Enoch, it is recorded that “he pleased God” (Heb 11:5). That must not be carnalized as though He were subject to emotions; neither must it be emptied of all meaning. The Lord is so infinitely above us that no analogy can be found in human relations. But to aid our feeble perceptions, take a tutor who has gone to particular pains in instructing one of his scholars: is he not gratified when he sees him at the top of his class? Or when parents behold their children putting into practice those precepts which they have so lovingly and earnestly instilled into them, do they not rejoice? So, when we act as becometh His people, we are “approved unto God” (2Ti 2:15). Said David, “he delivered me [from enemies], because he delighted in me” (2Sa 22:20). “Such as are upright in their way are his delight” (Pro 11:20). “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy” (Psa 147:11). “The prayer of the upright is his delight” (Pro 15:8). In reality, it is God approving *His own* handiwork, esteeming that which His Spirit has wrought in us; nevertheless, we are not passive therein, but determine and perform as He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phi 2:13).

As there are degrees in wickedness and obnoxiousness unto God, so there are of bringing delight unto Him. That for which Christians are here taught to pray—and therefore to diligently and constantly strive after—is to “walk worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing” (Col 1:10), which includes to “walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Psa 1:1), to “walk in the law of the LORD” (Psa 119:1), to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4), to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7), to “walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16), to “walk in love” (Eph 5:2), to “walk circumspectly” (Eph 5:15). As an aid thereto, observe the following rules.

First, be ever on your guard in avoiding everything that is grievous to God; and in order to do that, cultivate a sense of His *presence*. If you are on your best behaviour when in the company of cherished friends, how much more so should you be in the presence of your heavenly Friend! If the knowledge of human lookers-on restrains you from acts of sin, much more should a respect for the Holy One. That was what governed Joseph: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9).

Second, be diligent in choosing those things which God esteems. When Solomon sought wisdom that he might rule Israel righteously, we are told it “pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing” (1Ki 3:10). The more our hearts be set upon things above, and the more we aim at God’s glory, the greater pleasure will He have in us.

Third, be whole-hearted in your devotedness to the Lord. There must be no picking and choosing among His precepts: no in with one duty, and out with another. The whole scope of the Christian life should be a studying to show oneself approved unto God (2Ti 2:15): the understanding perceiving what is due to Him, the conscience swayed by His authority, the affections drawn out in adoring homage, the will surrendered to Him. Caleb was one who greatly pleased the Lord, and of him, it is recorded that “he *wholly* followed the LORD God” (Jos 14:14).

Fourth, meditate each second upon God’s Law day and night (Psa 1:2): make it your constant concern how to serve and honour Him, remembering that He is more pleased with obedience than with your worship and free-will offerings (1Sa 15:22).

Fifth, maintain a steady dependence upon the Lord, for you have no strength of your own: He must be daily sought unto for the needed wisdom and power. Frequent the Throne of Grace, that there you may “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Further: if we are to be approved by God, it is by no means sufficient that we “make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter” (Mat 23:25), yet many suppose that is all that matters. “Cleanse *first* that which is *within*” (Mat 23:26) is our Lord’s command; whereas in this degenerate day, such a task is not merely relegated to the second place, but it is given none at all. It is the Devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, and can no more change them than they can alter the stars in their courses. Such a lie is very agreeable unto those who think to be carried to heaven on downy beds of ease, and there are few left to disillusion them. But no regenerate soul, with God’s Word before him, will credit such a falsehood. The Divine demand is plain: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). That is the principal task set us, for it is at *the heart* God ever looks, and there can be no pleasing of Him while it be unattended to; yea, woe be unto those who disregard it. He who makes no honest endeavour to cast out sinful thoughts and evil imaginations, and does not mourn over their presence, is a moral leper. He who makes no conscience of the workings of unbelief, the cooling of his affections, the surgings of pride, is a stranger to any work of grace in his soul.

Not only does God bid thee to keep thy heart, but He requires thee to do it, “with all diligence”: that is, to make it your main concern and constant care. The Hebrew word for “keep” signifies *to guard*. Watch over thine heart (the soul or inward man) as a precious treasure, of which thieves are ever ready to rob thee. Guard it as a garrison, into which enemies will enter, if you be not on the alert. Attend to it as a garden in which the Lord would regale Himself (Song 6:2), removing all weeds and keeping its flowers and spices fragrant: that is, be diligent in mortifying your lusts and in cultivating your graces. The devotions of your lips and the labours of your hands are unacceptable to the Lord if your heart be not right in His sight. What husband would appreciate the domestic attentions of his wife if he had good reason to believe her affections were alienated from him? God takes note not only of the matter of our actions, but the springs from which they proceed, the motives actuating them, as also the manner in which they are done and our design in the same. If we become slack and careless in any of these respects, it shows that our love has cooled and that we have become weary of God.

The One with whom we have to do “is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed” (1Sa 2:3) in the balances of righteousness and truth; and whatever is “found wanting” or is deficient is rejected by Him. Nay more, we are told that “all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth *the spirits*” (Pro 16:2): i.e. that which lies behind the actions which colours, as well as prompts them. Self-love may blind our judgment and make us partial in our own cause, but we cannot deceive the Omniscient One. God not only brings our actions to the test and standard of holiness, but the frames of our spirits which inspired them. “For the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins” (Psa 7:9): that is, the inward principles from which our conduct proceeds. He scrutinizes our affections and motives, whether we be sincere or no. The Lord God is “he that pondereth the heart” (Pro 24:12), observing all its motions: its most secret intentions are open unto Him. He perceives when your contributions to His cause are made cheerfully or grudgingly. He knows whether your alms-deeds are done in order to be seen of men and admired by them, or whether they issue from disinterested benevolence. He knows whether your expressions of good will and love toward your brethren are feigned or genuine.

Since the Lord looketh on and pondereth the heart, should not we do so too? Since from the heart proceed the issues of life, should not we make it our chief concern and care? Out of the heart proceed all the evils mentioned by our Lord in Mark 7:21-22. But it is equally true that out of the heart proceed the fruit described in Galatians 5:22-23: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things” (Mat 12:35); but the good man will *not* do so, unless he diligently resists his inward corruptions and tends and nourishes his graces. If we are to walk worthily of the Lord “unto all pleasing,” we must frequently “search and try our ways” (Lam 3:40), take our spiritual pulse, and ascertain whether all be well within. We must heed that injunction, “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still” (Psa 4:4) that ye may ascertain your spiritual condition. We must daily attend to that precept, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21), lest anything be allowed that place in our affections which belongs alone to Christ. We must constantly examine our motives and challenge our aims and intentions, for *they* are what count most with God. We must “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh” (2Co 7:1).

Alas, how sadly has the standard been relaxed! How little is now heard, even in the centres of orthodoxy, of walking worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing! How very few today are being informed that God requires them to keep their *hearts* with all diligence (Pro 4:23), and to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phi 2:12). Will not the Lord yet say unto many an unfaithful occupant of the modern pulpit (and editors of religious magazines), “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right” (Job 42:7)? “You did not make known the high requirements of My holiness, nor teach My people those things which would most “adorn the doctrine” (Ti 2:10) they profess. You have been tithing mint and anise and cummin, but omitting “the weightier matters” (Mat 23:23): concerned with politics, wrangling over forms of church government, speculating about prophecy, but failing to insist on practical godliness. No wonder the “churches”—Calvinistic, equally with others—are in such a low state of spirituality. But the failure of those in the pulpit does not excuse those in the pew. The individual Christian still has access to God’s Word; and even if there were none others left on earth who respect it, *he* is responsible to be regulated by its elevated and exacting teachings. O Christian reader, whatever others do or do not, see to it that *you* turn Colossians 1:10 into daily prayer, and strive to translate it into practice.

It is for the glory of God and your own good that you do so. If you be careless about your walk, and indifferent as to whether the state of your heart be pleasing or displeasing unto the Lord, then His ear will be closed to your prayers! And that is something else about which little is preached today, even in those quarters which style themselves “places of truth.” Yet the Scriptures are explicit thereon: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, *because* we keep his commandments, and do those things that are *pleasing* in his sight” (1Jo 3:22): that cannot be “legalistic,” for those are the words of the Holy Spirit. It is not because our obedience is in anywise meritorious, but because this is the *order* of the things which Divine holiness has established. God has appointed an inseparable connection between the acceptableness of our conduct and of our petitions. If we would have His ear, then we must attend unto His voice. We cannot expect God to grant our requests while we ignore what He requires of us. Not that our obedience ingratiates us into God’s favour, but that it is a necessary adjunct to our receiving favours at His hand. We must delight ourselves in the Lord, if we would have Him grant us the desires of our heart (Psa 37:4).

As the prohibitions ever imply the performance of the opposites—as “thou shalt not kill” (Exo 20:13) signifies thou shalt use all lawful means to preserve life, and “thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exo 20:14)

involves thou shalt live chastely—so each positive precept argues its negative, as 1 John 3:22 also imports we shall not receive from God those things we ask of Him, if we keep not His commandments and do not those things which are pleasing in His sight. Should any uncertainty remain in this point, then Proverbs 38:9 at once removes it: “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Pro 28:9). God has appointed an inseparable connection between the performance of duty and the enjoyment of privilege. Psalm 66:18 is yet more searching, showing again what God requires within as well as without: “If I regard iniquity in my *heart*, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:18). If I countenance and secretly foster any sin, even though I practise it not; if I view it favourably or even palliate and excuse it, His ear is closed against me. Unrepented and confessed sins prevent many a prayer from being answered. The Holy One will not connive at sin, “For God to accept our devotions while we are delighting in sin, would make Him the God of hypocrites” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892).

If we are to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,” then we must be most attentive in the cultivation of *faith*, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6). The more fully and constantly we trust Him, the more we walk by faith, the more will the Lord delight in us. Does not a husband, a wife, a parent, a friend, like to be confided in? In an infinitely higher sense, God is pleased when we cling to Him in the darkness, look to Him for the fulfilling of His promises, count upon His loving kindness. But He is displeased when we doubt His Word or suspect His love. Faith in God, in His precepts, in His promises, is the grand and distinguishing principle which is to actuate all our conduct, for it is that which honours and magnifies Him. Abraham was “strong in faith, giving glory to God,” being fully assured that He would—despite all appearances to the contrary—make good His Word (Rom 4:20-21). To give glory to God is to regard Him as being what He really is—all-mighty, faithful. It is to show by our conduct that we give Him full credit (so to speak) that He can and will do what He has said.

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually...giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:15-16). Then let us not be backward in offering them. God loves to hear the songs of His children. The “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2Sa 23:1) is how He designated David. “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me” (Psa 50:23). If our walk be regulated by the Rule God has given us, then our praise will be acceptable unto Him, for it is the breathing of love and joy, rendering to Him His due. Yea, more it will—as it is the spontaneous, hearty, grateful tribute of the heart—*glorify* Him. Praise is an exalting of God’s name, a proclaiming of His excellency, a publishing of His renown, an adoring of His goodness, a breaking open the box of our ointment; and therefore, it is a “sweet savour” unto Him. “I...will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall *please* the LORD better than an ox” (Psa 69:30-31)—how comforting was that for the one who was unable to bring Him a costly offering! If God deems it an honour to be well pleased with our praises and condescends to accept them as an offering from us, let us be frequently engaged in this delightful exercise and act like spiritual larks.

But let it not be concluded that it is only in the *devotional* side of our lives that we may give delight unto God. Different by far is the teaching of His Word. The Lord not only takes notice of our attitude toward and actions unto Himself, but also of our conduct and dealings with our fellows. We may please Him—and it should be our diligent aim so to do—in the shop, the office, the factory, the home. “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight” (Pro 11:1). Under that word “balance,” we are to include all weights and measures, descriptions of articles and profits therefrom. Such a verse as that should be carefully pondered and kept constantly in mind by all who are engaged in any form of business, whether they be employers or employees—making conscience of all their words and deeds. To misrepresent a piece of merchandise, to overcharge, or to deliberately short-change a customer, is a grievous sin, which—though it may escape the notice of men—is recorded against us by the Holy One, and we shall be made to pay dearly for the same. Contrariwise, to be fair and honest in our trading is pleasing unto God: “Such as are upright in their way are his delight” (Pro 11:20).

Not only does God take notice of and record the sins of those who are guilty of unjust and fraudulent practices, but He refuses the hypocritical homage of all such. There is no bringing¹ of the Divine Judge, nor can He be imposed upon by a pious demeanour in those who wrong their fellows. They who grind the faces of the poor through the week, and equally those who fail to supply a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, only mock the Lord when they sing His praises and make an offering to His cause on the Sabbath day. “The

¹ **bringing** – to carry or convey along.

sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of *the upright* is his delight” (Pro 15:8). The external acts of worship of those whose business dealings are corrupt are an offence unto the Most High, and it is the bounden duty of the pulpit to announce it. “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law [which enjoins loving our neighbour as ourself], even his prayer shall be abomination” (Pro 28:9). We do but deceive ourselves if we imagine God hearkens to our petitions, while our every-day lives give the lie to our devotions. On the other hand, “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth [favourably] behold the upright” (Psa 11:7). Everything we do either pleases or displeases God.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

19. *The Ark (3:4-6)*

“Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore” (Jos 3:4). Having pointed out some of the probable reasons why the ark was to proceed so far in advance of the people, we must now turn to consider the meaning of the last clause of this verse. Personally, we consider the commentators and sermonizers have quite missed the force of the “for ye have not passed this way heretofore” when they explain it is signifying, “for ye are about to march over *unfamiliar* ground.” Admittedly the Hebrew, and at first glance, this English rendering appears to decidedly favour such a view; yet, a careful weighing of this clause in the light of its whole setting seem to require a different interpretation of it, understanding it to mean, “for ye have not marched in this *manner* hitherto.” Nor is that by any means a wresting of the text, for though the Hebrew word *derek* be translated “way” in the vast majority of instances, yet it is rendered “manner” eight times—as, for example, in Genesis 19:31 and Isaiah 10:24, 26.

To give as the reason why the children of Israel should follow the ark on this occasion, as “because ye are about to tread new and strange ground” seems to possess little or no point, for had not *that* been equally true on most of their journeying across the wilderness! But, it will be asked, to what else is the reference? We answer something entirely different from what had marked their marches previously, as the “heretofore” indicates. The immediate context is concerned with the informing of Israel as to when they were to advance: “When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, *then* ye shall remove from your place, and go after it” (Jos 3:3). Hitherto, it was only when the cloud moved that they did so too (see Exo 13:21-22, 40:38); “whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed” (Num 9:21, and compare 14:14). During the whole of the preceding forty years, Israel had been led by that supernatural “pillar of cloud,” but now and henceforth, that cloud was no longer to be with them. It was a visible token of Jehovah’s presence, especially granted unto Moses; and with his death, it disappeared.

A different arrangement was now made, a new means for recognizing God’s will concerning their journeyings was now revealed unto Israel; another symbol of Jehovah’s presence should henceforth strike terror into the hearts of His enemies. The ark of the covenant now took, in an important sense, a new position. Formerly, when journeying, the ark had been carried in the midst of the host. It had indeed gone before Israel on one previous occasion “to search out a resting place for them” (Num 10:33); yet the very next verse informs us, “and the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp” (Num 10:34); and, as we have seen, the immediate sequel was the fatal apostasy of that generation. The cloud had moved above the ark (compare Lev 16:2), where all the people could see it easily and follow the ark without inconvenience; but now the cloud was no longer with them—the ark becoming their visible guide. Another indication of this new arrangement appears in the ones who bore the ark. A specific command had been given that the ark should be carried by the sons of Kohath (Num 3:30-31; 4:15), but here “the priests” were appointed as its bearers.

Thus, in keeping with this new venture by the new generation, a different order of procedure was appointed—“ye have not traveled in this manner before.” The first generation of Israel had been a lamentable and utter failure, but there can never be any failure with the Lord God, nor in the accomplishment of His eternal counsels. God always takes care of His own glory and of the full and final blessing of His people according to His purpose; yea, He never suffers them to be divorced or pass out of His own hands. In His wondrous wisdom and amazing grace, God has inseparably united the two, and therefore, does He make all things work together for the accomplishment of each alike, for He has made His people and their blessing a constituent part of His glory—“Israel my glory” (Isa 46:13). Thus we see how fitting it was that the ark of the covenant went in advance of the twelve tribes on their entrance into Canaan, which the Lord had chosen to be the place where He would make a full display of Himself in the midst of His people. As the Lord had magnified Himself before Pharaoh and his hosts in Egypt and at the Red Sea in connection with Israel’s exodus, so now He would magnify Himself in the sight of the Canaanites as He bared His arm on behalf of His people.

This is indeed a marvellous and blessed truth that God has bound up the good of His people with His own manifestative glory; that at the same time He furthers the one, He promotes the other also. It is a truth

which ought to exercise a powerful influence upon our hearts and lives, both in strengthening holy confidence and in preventing unholy conduct. It furnishes us with an invincible plea when praying for the prosperity of God's cause on earth, or for our own individual fruitfulness: "Grant it, O Lord, for the honour of Thy great name." It was on *that* ground Moses, in a sore crisis, presented his petition (Num 14:15-17); so Joshua (Jos 7:9), Hezekiah (2Ki 19:19), Joel (Joel 2:17). But One far greater than any of those prayed, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (Joh 17:1). And should not each Christian say, "Father, undertake for me, that Thy child may—in his measure—glorify Thee"! Yet this wondrous truth has a bearing on duty, as well as privilege. Since my good and God's glory be inseparably united, how careful I should be in avoiding everything which would bring reproach upon His name! How diligent in seeking to tread that path where communion with Him is alone to be had! How zealous in doing "all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31).

"And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Jos 3:5). The word "sanctify" is one of the most difficult terms to define that is used in Scripture: partly because of the great variety of objects to which it is applied; partly because it has so many different shades of meaning; partly because doctrinally and experimentally considered, there is both a Divine and a human side to sanctification, and few find it easy to adjust those two sides in their minds. With their customary partiality, Calvinistic writers and preachers confine themselves almost entirely to the Church's sanctification by the Father (setting her apart from the non-elect by His eternal decree), by the Son (who cleansed her from her sins and adorned her by His merits), and by the Holy Spirit (by her regeneration and daily renewing), but say little or nothing upon the necessity and duty of the Christian's *sanctifying himself*. Whereas Arminian writers and preachers dwell almost exclusively on the human side of things, as the believer's dedication of himself unto God and His service, and his daily cleansing of himself by the Word. Since the days of the Puritans, few indeed have made a full-orbed presentation of this important truth.

The first time the term occurs in Holy Writ is Genesis 2:3; and, as is invariably the case, this *initial* mention at once indicates its essential meaning and content: "And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it," which obviously means that He separated it from the other six days and set it apart for His own particular use—such is the underlying and root idea in all its subsequent occurrences where *God* Himself is the Agent or Actor. The next reference is Exodus 13:2: "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine": that was something which the Lord required *from them*—namely, to dedicate and devote the firstborn entirely unto Him. The third occurrence is in Exodus 19: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai" (Exo 19:10-11, and see verse 15). There, the word "sanctify" manifestly has reference unto a personal cleansing by the Israelites themselves, to fit them for the approach of the thrice Holy One.

Now it is quite clear that the injunction which Joshua gave unto Israel in Joshua 3:5 was of precisely the same import as that which Moses received for the people in Exodus 19. The Lord was about to appear on their behalf, and they were required to be in a meet condition. When God bade Jacob go to Bethel and make there an altar unto Him, we are told that the patriarch said unto his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments" (Gen 35:1-2)—idols and the worship of the Lord do not accord. Unto the elders of Bethlehem, the prophet said, "Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice" (1Sa 16:5). In each case, the reference was first unto the removal of ceremonial defilement, the putting away of all outward pollution, and then to bringing their hearts into a suitable frame towards the One with whom they had to do—for God has never been satisfied with mere external purification and punctiliousness of formal worship (Isa 29:13-14). Sacred duties call for diligent preparation on the part of those who would discharge them. Holy things are not to be touched with unholy hands, nor approached with hearts filled by the world (Psa 26:6; 1Ti 2:8).

Christians are bidden to draw near unto God, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience [i.e. all known sin forsaken and confessed], and our bodies washed with pure water"—our daily walk regulated and purified by the Word (Heb 10:22), for we must not insult Him by carelessness and moral unfitness. In order thereto, we need to give constant heed to that precept, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). And be it carefully noted that "cleanse ourselves" is as much a part of the inspired Word of God as is "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son

cleanseth us from all sin"; and that that latter statement is qualified by (though scarcely ever quoted!), "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1Jo 1:7). The Holy One requires us to sanctify ourselves both internally and externally; and if we do not, our worship is unacceptable. "If a man therefore purge himself from these [the things which "dishonour"], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2Ti 2:21). "And every man that hath this hope in him *purifieth himself*, even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:3). How? By mortifying his lusts and cultivating his graces, by daily repentings and renewings of his consecration.

"Sanctify yourselves," then, has been an imperative requirement of God upon His people in all generations. The only difference which the change of covenant has made is that, under the old, their sanctification of themselves consisted chiefly in a ceremonial and external purification, while that of the new is principally a moral and internal one; and where *that* obtains, the outward life will be adjusted to our Rule. No servant of Christ declares, "all the counsel of God" (Act 20:27) who fails to press that imperative requirement of God's upon His people; and if he be silent thereon, he withholds that which is "profitable" for them (Act 20:20). *We* must "draw nigh to God" if we would have Him draw nigh unto us (Jam 4:8); and—as that verse goes on to tell the careless and those with unexercised consciences—in order to draw near unto Him aright, we must "cleanse our hands and purify our hearts"! "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psa 24:3), which in New Testament language means, who shall be received by God as an acceptable worshipper? The inspired answer is, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psa 24:4). Alas, that so little heed is now given to such verses.

"And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Jos 3:5). That was an enforcing of their moral responsibility. It was a call for them to cleanse themselves and dedicate themselves unto the Lord their God. It was a bidding of them to prepare themselves by prayer and meditation, to recall God's gracious interventions in the past, to ponder His ineffable holiness, awful majesty, mighty power, and abundant mercy; and thereby bring their hearts into a fit frame, so that with faith, reverence, and admiration, they might behold the great work which Jehovah was about to do for them. They must be in a suitable condition in order to witness such a manifestation of His glory: their hearts must be "perfect toward him"—sincere and upright, honest and holy—if He was to show "himself strong" in their behalf (2Ch 16:9). Have we not here the explanation why God is *not* now performing marvels in the churches?—they are too carnal and worldly! And is not this the reason why a way is not being made through our personal "Jordans"? And why we receive not wondrous and blessed discoveries of His glory?—we are not "sanctified" in a practical way, nor sufficiently separated from the world.

"And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you." Observe the positive and confident language of Joshua: there was no doubt whatever in his mind that their covenant God would perform a miracle on their behalf; and therefore, he assured them accordingly. What an example for Christ's servant to follow! He has no right to expect that his flock will wax valiant in fight if their shepherd be full of unbelief and fear. And, too, when urging upon them the duty of self-sanctification, he should fail not to add the encouragement, "the LORD will do wonders" (Jos 3:5), for sure it is that the more we shun that which defiles, and devote ourselves unto God's service and glory, the more will He work mightily in us, for us, and through us. It is quite possible that on this occasion, Joshua had in mind that word, "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered" (Num 10:35); for certain Joshua saw that, when the ark should now advance, the waters of the Jordan would recede.

"And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people" (Jos 3:6). Having directed the people what to do, Joshua now gives instruction unto the priests. Thereby he acted in strict accord with his own personal commission ("to do according to all that is written therein" in this book of the Law, Jos 1:8—i.e., the Pentateuch), for in preparation of Jehovah's descent upon Sinai, Moses had given express charge to the priests, as well as to the people (Exo 19:22). In the charge here given to the priests, we see how their subjection to the revealed will of God was put to the proof, how their faith and courage were tested, and how their reverence for the symbol of the Lord's presence was to be manifested. Corresponding unto them today are the ministers of the Gospel, concerning whom Thomas Scott (1747-1821) well said, "They are especially required to set before the people an example of obedience, patience, and unshakable

confidence in God, by abiding in their perilous position or difficult stations which He has assigned them, when others fear to pass that way; and in so doing, they may expect peculiar support and protection.”

The people were commanded to follow the priests as far as they carried the ark, but no farther; and God’s children today are responsible to heed and obey His servants (Heb 13:7, 17) only while they set forth and honour Him of whom the ark was a figure. Namely, Christ; yet not simply as a Saviour, but in the fullness of His threefold office: as our Prophet or Teacher (the Law within the ark), our Priest (the propitiatory upon it), our King and Lord (“the ark of *the covenant*”). But the minister of the Gospel is required to do more than faithfully preach Christ; namely, *live* Him: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1Ti 4:12); “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works” (Ti 2:7; and compare 1Th 2:10; 1Pe 5:3). The minister is to set before his people a godly example. Unless he takes the lead in enduring hardships and facing dangers (not showing more concern for his own ease and safety), then his exhortations unto self-denial and courageous action will have no power upon his hearers.

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

3. *The Existence of God, Part 3*

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psa 19:1). The stellar heavens proclaim the attributes of their Maker, bespeaking not only His existence, but His excellency; while the atmospheric heavens exhibit His unique skill, revealing to us both their Author and His wondrous wisdom. Upon the former, many have descanted, but the latter has received very much less notice. The “firmament” signifies “the expanse” and—as distinct from the sphere of the more distant planets—refers to the atmosphere surrounding the earth: the air in which the clouds are seen. The Hebrew verb rendered “sheweth” means to “place before” for our thoughtful inspection, as challenging our most serious and reverent contemplation. Though the atmosphere be not an object of our sight—and for that reason, is little regarded—yet it is a most remarkable contrivance or apparatus, a source of many advantage to us, and one which richly repays those who carefully consider it and take pleasure in seeking out the works of the Lord (Psa 111:2).

The atmospheric pressure upon a person of ordinary stature is equal to the weight of fourteen tons; and it scarcely needs to be pointed out that the falling upon him of a very much lighter object would break every bone in his body and drive all breath out of his lungs. Why then is it that we suffer no inconvenience from it, nay, thrive therein and enjoy it? Here is a phenomenon, which, if thus viewed, is not unlike that which so awed Moses of old when he beheld the miracle of the burning bush—the combustible substance all aflame and yet not consumed. And by what means are we preserved from that which, considered abstractly, is such a deadly menace? By the Creator’s having so devised that the air permeates the whole of our body, and by its peculiar nature pressing equally in all directions, all harm and discomfort is prevented—“the heads of the thigh and arm bones are kept in their sockets by atmospheric pressure” (*International Encyclopedia*).

The air, commissioned by its benign Author, performs many offices for the good of mankind. While it covers us without any conscious weight, the air reflects, and thereby increases, the life-giving heat of the sun. The air does this for us much as our garments supply additional heat to our bodies. If the reader has, like the writer, climbed a mountain and reached a point thirteen thousand feet above sea level, then he has proved for himself how considerably the solar warmth is diminished as the quality of the air becomes more attenuated. At its base, the climate was comfortably warm, but had we remained a night on its summit, death by freezing would have been the outcome. What reason have we, then, to bless the Disposer of all things for placing us at a level where we suffer no ill or inconvenience from the atmosphere, for the combined wisdom of men could no more moderate it than regulate the actions of the ocean.

The air co-operates with our lungs, thereby ventilating the blood and refining the fluids of the body, stimulating the animal secretions, and attempering our natural warmth. We could live for months without the light of the sun or the glimmering of a star, but if deprived of air for a very few minutes, we quickly faint and die. Not to us alone does this “universal nurse”—as James Hervey (1714-1758) eloquently styled her—minister: it is this gaseous element enveloping the earth which both sustains and feeds all vegetable life. Again, the air conveys to our nostrils those minute particles (effluvia), which are emitted by odiferous bodies, so that we are both refreshed by the sweet fragrance of flowers and warned by offensive smells to withdraw from a dangerous situation or beware of injurious food. So, by the undulating motions of the air, all the diversities of sound are conducted to the ear, for if you were placed in a room from which all air had been withdrawn and a full orchestra (wearing artificial respirators) played at fortissimo, not a sound would you hear.

Not only does the air waft to our senses all the charming modulations of music and the elevating influences of refined and edifying conversation, but it also acts as a seasonable and faithful monitor. For example, should I be walking along the road—my eyes looking off unto some object, or my mind so absorbed that I am completely off my guard—and a vehicle be bearing down upon me from behind, though my eyes perceive not my danger, yet my ear takes alarm and informs me of my peril, even while it be some distance away, and with kindly if clamorous importunity bids me act for my safety. Let us, then, inquire, What is it that has endowed the atmosphere with such varied and beneficent adaptations, so that it diffuses vitality and health, retains and modifies solar heat, transmits odours, and conveys sound? Must we not ra-

ther ask, "Whom?" and answer, "This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working" (Isa 28:29).

"Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. Dost thou know when God disposed them [i.e. the winds and clouds, the thunder and lightning, the frost and rain], and caused the light of his cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:14-16). The same queries are addressed unto each of us, and call for calm and quiet reflection. "Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" which appear in the firmament. That is, cease for an hour from your feverish activities and devote yourself, as a rational creature, unto serious reflection, and compose yourself for thoughtful contemplation. "Consider" what is brought forth in, by, and from the atmosphere; and then be filled with reverent wonderment and awe. Ponder well the fact that water is much denser and far heavier than the air, and yet it rises into it, makes a way through it, and takes up a position in its uppermost regions! One would just as soon expect the rivers to run backward to their source; yet Divine wisdom has contrived a way to render it not only practicable, but a matter of continual occurrence.

There in the firmament, we behold an endless succession of clouds fed by evaporation from the ocean, drawn thither by the action of the sun. The clouds are themselves a miniature ocean, suspended in the air with a skill which as far transcends that of the wisest man as his knowledge does that of an infant in arms. It is because so very few "stand still, and consider" (Job 37:14) the amazing fact of millions of tons of water being suspended over their heads, and sustained there in the thinnest parts of the atmosphere, that such a prodigy is lost upon them. The writer recalls the impressions made upon him over thirty years ago, as he was driven around the Roosevelt Dam in Arizona and inspected that great engineering feat—probably some of our readers have experienced similar ones as they have beheld some huge reservoir of human contrivance. But what are *they* in comparison with the immeasurably vaster quantities of water, which, without any conduits of stone or barriers of cement, are suspended in the clouds, and kept there in a buoyant state!

The clouds, as another pointed out, "travel in detached parties, and in the quality of itinerant cisterns round all the terrestrial globe. They fructify by proper communications of moisture the spacious pastures of the wealthy, and gladden with no less liberal showers the cottager's little garden. Nay, so condescending is the benignity of the great Proprietor that they satisfy the desolate and waste ground, and cause, even in the most uncultivated wilds, the bud of the tender herb to spring forth, so that the natives of the lonely desert, those savage herds which know no master's stall, may nevertheless experience the care and rejoice in the bounty of an all-supporting Parent"—*J. Hervey*. But what most fills us with wonderment is that these celestial reservoirs, so incalculably greater than any of human construction, should be *suspended in the air*. This it was which so evoked the admiration of both Job and Eliphaz: "He [saith the former] bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is *not rent* under them" (Job 26:8)—notwithstanding their prodigious weight.

One of the things attributed to God in Holy Writ is that He has fixed "the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" (Jer 5:22). If it be not its Maker whose mandate had determined the bounds of the sea, *who has* fixed its limits? Certainly not man, for he who cannot control himself is scarcely competent to issue effective orders to the ocean. That was made fully evident in the days of Noah when, for the first and last time, God gave the waters their full freedom; and dire was the consequence, for the whole human race was helpless before them. Without that Divine decree, the impetuous sea would again overflow the earth, for such is its natural propensity. But by the mere fiat of His lips, God immutably controls this turbulent element. On some coasts, high cliffs of rock serve as impregnable ramparts against the raging main; but in others—to evince God is confined to no expedients, but orders all things according to the counsel of His own will—He bids a frail bank of earth curb the fury of its angry waves.

But wonderful as it is that, by the Divine ordinance, a narrow belt of contemptible sand should confine the sea to its appointed limits; yet to us, it seems even more remarkable that such immense volumes of water are held in the air within the compass of the clouds. Writing thereon, one of the ablest of the Puritans pointed out: "There are three things very wonderful in that detention of the waters. First, that the waters, which are a fluid body and love to be continually flowing and diffusing themselves, should yet be stopped and stayed together by a *cloud*, which is a thinner and so a more fluid body than the water. It is no great matter to see water kept in conduits of stone or in vessels of brass, because these are firm and solid bodies, such as the water cannot penetrate nor force its way through; but in the judgment of nature, how improba-

ble is it that a thin cloud should bear such a weight and power of waters, and yet not rend nor break under them! This is one of the miracles in nature, which is therefore not wondered at because it is so common, and which, because it is constant, is not inquired into.

“Second, as it is a wonder that the cloud is *not* rent under the weight of water, so that the cloud is rent at the special order and command of God. At His word, it is that the clouds are locked up; and by His word, they are opened. As in spiritual things, so in natural: ‘He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth’ (Rev 3:7). Third, this also is wonderful that when at the word of God, the cloud rents; yet the waters do not gush out like a violent flood all at once, which would quickly drown the earth, but descend in moderate showers, as water through a colander, drop by drop. God carrieth the clouds up and down the world, as the gardener does his watering can, and bids them distil upon this or that place as Himself directeth. The clouds are compared to “bottles” in Job 38:37; and those God stops or unstops, usually as our need requires, and sometimes as our sin deserves. ‘I have withholden the rain from you’ (Amo 4:7); and He can withhold it till the heavens above us shall be as brass and the earth under us as iron. ‘I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it’ (Isa 5:6)”—*Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), 1643.*

There were still other features of the handiwork of God in the firmament which Job was enjoined to stand still and consider—namely, that God “caused the light of His cloud to shine,” and “the balancings of the clouds,” which are denominated “the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:15-16). Upon the expanse of ether overhead, we behold scenes infinitely more exquisite than any which a Turner or a Raphael could produce: sights so delicately coloured, so subtle in texture, so vast in extent, they could do no justice unto in their attempts to reproduce. What artist’s brush can begin to portray the splendours of the eastern sky as the monarch of the day emerges from his rest, or the entrancing magnificence of the western horizon as he retires to slumber? The Hebrew verb for “shine” in Job 37:15 means to shine in an illustrious manner, as in Deuteronomy 33:2 (and compare Psalm 50:2; 80:1), and “the light of his cloud” refers to the light of the sun’s reflection from or upon a watery cloud, producing that wonderful phenomenon, the rainbow, which is so conspicuous and beautiful, so desirable and attractive, so mysterious and marvellous.

“Dost thou know the *balancings* of the clouds?” (Job 37:16). Canst thou explain how such prodigious volumes of water are suspended over thine head and held there in the thinnest parts of the atmosphere? Canst thou tell what it is which causes those ponderous lakes to hang so evenly and hover like the lightest down? What poises those thick and heavy vapours in coverings so much lighter and thinner than themselves, and prevents their rushing down more impetuously than a mountain torrent? Must we not again employ the personal pronoun, and answer, “He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them” (Job 26:8). Who puts the clouds, as it were, into scales, and so orders their weight that one does not overpower another, but rather hang evenly? This is another of the wondrous works of God, who makes the clouds smaller or larger, higher or lower, according to the service He hath appointed and the use He makes of them; nothing but the Divine wisdom and power can satisfactorily account for such a prodigy.

Yes, “He *bindeth up* the waters in his thick clouds” (Job 26:8). Those masses of water do not remain stationary in the firmament of themselves; nor could they, for, being so much heavier than the air, they would naturally fall of their own weight and power at once in disorder and ruin to the land beneath. It is God who makes them behave and perform His bidding. By some secret power of His own, God fetters them so that they cannot move until He permits. And though these waters be of such mighty bulk and weight, they do not rend the fleecy filament which contain them. “The cloud is not *rent* under them”: the same Hebrew word is rendered “divided” in Psalm 78:13, where the reference is to the Almighty cleaving a way for His people through the Red Sea. There is a natural tendency and power in those waters *to* rend the clouds, but until God bids them, they are held in place, delicately poised, mysteriously but perfectly balanced.

“Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields” (Job 5:9-10). Observe the tense of the verb in the first sentence: it is not only that God “hath done” or that He “will do” great things, though both be true, but that He *now* “doeth” as a present and continued act for us to take notice of today. Among those stupendous and inscrutable wonders is His sending of the rain, which, though an almost daily provision, is something which men can neither manufacture nor regulate its supply. We do not have far to go in order to inquire or actually see these “marvellous things”: they are near to hand, of frequent occurrence, and, if closely looked into,

every shower of rain discovers the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. Nature works not without the God of nature, and its common blessings are not dispensed without a special providence. The course of nature only moves as it is turned by the hand of its Maker and directed by His counsels. The heaviest clouds distil no water until they receive commission from God to dissolve.

“For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly” (Job 36:27-28). “Rain is the moisture of the earth drawn up by the heat of the sun into the middle region of the air, which being there condensed into clouds is afterward, at the will of God, dissolved and dropped down again in showers” (Joseph Caryl, 1602-1673). Though an ordinary and common work of God, yet it is a very admirable one. The Psalmist tells us God “*prepareth* rain for the earth” (Psa 147:18). He does so by the method just described, and then by “making small” its drops, for unless He did the latter, it would pour down in a flood. That too is a work of His power and mercy, for the earth could not absorb solid volumes of water at once.

“Also can any understand the *spreadings* of the clouds?” (Job 36:29). Fully so? No, as the diverse and inadequate theorizings of men go to show. It is almost amusing to examine the various answers returned by philosophers and scientists to the question. What holds the clouds in position? The heat of the sun, say some. But if that were the case, rain would fall during the night only, whereas, the fact is that as many clouds break and empty themselves in the daytime as during the hours of darkness. By the winds, which keep them in perpetual motion, say others. But how can that be, for sometimes the clouds unburden themselves when a hurricane is blowing; and at others, in a dead calm. By their sponginess, which permits their being permeated by the air, thus holding them in place, say others. Then why do light and heavy clouds alike move and evaporate? We are logically forced to rise higher, to the will and power of *God*. It is also of His mercy that the clouds serve as a cool canopy over our heads and break the fierce heat and glare of the sun.

Let us pause here and make practical application of what has been before us. These wonders of nature, so little considered by the majority of our fellows, should speak loudly to our hearts. They should awe us, humble us, bow us in wonderment before the Author of such works. But it is more especially the children of God we now have in mind—and particularly those who are in straits and trouble, whose way is hedged up, whose outlook appears dark and foreboding. As we have contemplated such marvels of Divine wisdom and power, should not our faith be strengthened, so that we look upward with renewed confidence unto our Heavenly Father? Must we not, in view of such prodigies, join with the prophet in exclaiming, “There is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer 32:17)? Cannot He who has commissioned the very atmosphere to perform so many useful and benevolent offices for thy good, relieve thy temporal distress? Cannot He who sustains such mighty volumes of water over thy head, also support and succour thee? Cannot He who paints the glorious sunrise shine into thy soul and dissipate its gloom? Consider the rainbow, not only as a mystery and marvel of nature, but also as a sacramental sign, as a token of God’s covenant faithfulness.

That is the use we should make of “the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16). That is how we should “consider” them, and the conclusion we should draw from them. There is no limit to the power of that One who in the beginning made heaven and earth, and who, throughout the centuries, has preserved them in being. When we are confronted with difficulties which seem insurmountable, we should look above, around, below, and behold the marvellous handiwork of God; and commit ourselves and our case into His hands with full assurance. When Hezekiah was confronted with the formidable hosts of Sennacherib, he sought refuge in the Divine omnipotence, spreading that king’s haughty letter before the Lord and appealing to Him as “thou hast made heaven and earth” (2Ki 19:15); and therefore, canst vanquish for us our enemies. So too the apostles, when forbidden by the authorities to preach the Gospel, appealed to God as the One who “made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (Act 4:24, 29). Rest, then, in this blessed and stimulating truth, that “there is nothing too hard” for Him who hath loved thee with an everlasting love!

THE GREAT CHANGE

Part 3

“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19). In the past, the apostle had laboured hard in preaching the Gospel to the Galatians, and apparently, his efforts had met with considerable success. He had plainly set before them “Christ...crucified” (Gal 3:1) as the sinner’s only hope; and many had professed to receive Him as He was offered in the Gospel. They had abandoned their idolatry, seemed to be soundly converted, and had expressed great affection for their spiritual father (Gal 4:15). For a time, they had “run well,” but they had been hindered (Gal 5:7). After Paul’s departure, false teachers sought to seduce them from the faith and persuade them that they must be circumcised and keep the ceremonial law in order to salvation. They had so far given ear unto those Judaisers that Paul now stood in doubt of them (Gal 4:20), being fearful lest after all they had never been truly regenerated (Gal 4:11). It is to be carefully noted that he did not take refuge in fatalism and say, If God has begun a good work in them, He will certainly finish it, so there is no need for me to be unduly worried. Very much the reverse.

No, the apostle was much exercised over their state and earnestly solicitous about their welfare. By this strong figure of speech, “I travail in birth again” (Gal 4:19), the apostle intimated both his deep concern and his willingness to labour and suffer ministerially after their conversion, to spare no pains in seeking to deliver them from their present delusion and get them thoroughly established in the truth of the Gospel. He longed to be assured that the great change had taken place in them, which he speaks of as “Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19). By which we understand that they might be genuinely evangelized by a saving knowledge of Christ. First, that by spiritual apprehension of the Truth, He might be revealed in their understandings. Second, that by the exercise of faith upon Him, He might dwell in their hearts (Eph 3:17): faith gives a subsistence and reality in the soul of that object on which it is acted (Heb 11:1). Third, that He might be so endeared to their affections that neither Moses nor any one else could be admitted as a rival. Fourth, that by the surrender of their wills, He might occupy the throne of their hearts and rule over them. Christ thus “formed in” us is the proof of His righteousness imputed to us.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). In those words, the apostle completes the blessed declaration he had made in verses 8 and 9, thereby preserving the balance of Truth. Verses 8 and 9 present only one side of the Gospel and ought never to be quoted without adding the other side. None so earnest as Paul in proclaiming sovereign grace; none more insistent in maintaining practical godliness. Has God chosen His people in Christ before the foundation of the world? It was that they “should be holy” (Eph 1:4). Did Christ give Himself for us? It was that “he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14). So here, immediately after magnifying free grace, Paul states with equal clearness the moral results of God’s saving power, as they are exhibited with more or less distinctness in the lives of His people. Salvation by grace is evidenced by holy conduct: unless our lives are characterized by “good works,” we have no warrant to regard ourselves as being the children of God.

“We are his workmanship”: He, and not ourselves, had made us what we are spiritually. “Created in Christ Jesus” means made vitally one with Him. “In Christ” always has reference to *union* with Him: in Ephesians 1:4, to a mystical or election union; in 1 Corinthians 15:22, to a federal or representative one; in 1 Corinthians 6:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, to a vital or living one. Saving faith (product of the Spirit’s quickening us) makes us branches of the living Vine, from whom our fruit proceeds (Hos 14:8). “Created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works” (Eph 2:10) expresses the design and efficacy of God’s workmanship, being parallel with “this people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” (Isa 43:21). God fits the thing for which He creates it: fire to burn, the earth to yield food, His saints to walk in good works—God’s work in their souls inclining and propelling thereunto. He creates us in Christ, or gives us vital union with Him, that we should walk in newness of life—He being the Root from which all the fruits of righteousness proceed. United to the Holy One, holy conduct marks us. Those who live in sin have never been savingly jointed to Christ. God saves that we may glorify Him by a life of obedience.

“Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). Those words occur in the practical section of the epistle, being part of an exhortation which begins at verse 22, the passage as a whole being similar to Romans 13:12-14. Its force is, Make it manifest by your conduct that

you are regenerate creatures, exhibiting before your fellows the character of God's children. That which most concerns us now is the particular description which is here given of the great change effected in the regenerate—namely, a “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). With our present passage, it should be carefully compared with the parallel one in Colossians, for the one helps to explain and supplements the other. There we read, “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10). In both, we find the expression “the new man,” by which we are *not* to understand that a new individual has been brought into existence, that a person is now brought forth who previously had no being. Great care needs to be taken when seeking to understand and explain the meaning of terms which are taken from the material realm and applied to spiritual objects and things.

A regenerated sinner is the same individual he was before, though a great change has taken place in his soul. How different the landscape when the sun is shining than when darkness of a moonless night is upon it—the same landscape and yet not the same! How different the condition of one who is restored to fullness of health and vigour after being brought very low by serious illness—yet it is the same person. How different will be the body of the saint on the Resurrection morning from its present state—the same body which was sown in the grave, and yet not the same! So too with those saints alive on earth at the Redeemer's return: “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phi 3:21). Thus it is, in measure, at regeneration: the soul undergoes a Divine work of renovation and transformation: a new light shines into the understanding, a new Object engages the affections, a new power moves the will. It is the same individual, and yet not the same. “Once I was blind, but now I see” is his blessed experience.

In Ephesians 4:24, we read of the new man “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”; while in Colossians 3:10, it is said “which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him,” i.e. originally. By comparing the two passages, we understand the “which after God” to signify in conformity to Himself, for it is parallel with “after the image of him.” That the new man is said to be “created” denotes that this spiritual transformation is a Divine work in which the human individual plays no part—either by contribution, co-operation, or concurrence. It is wholly a supernatural operation, in which the subject of it is entirely passive. The “which is *renewed*” of Colossians 3:10 denotes that it is not something which previously had no existence, but the spiritual quickening and renovating of the soul. By regeneration is restored to the Christian's soul the moral image of God, which image he lost in Adam at the fall. That “image” consists in “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24) being imparted to the soul, or, as Colossians 3:10 expresses it, in the spiritual “knowledge” of God. God is now known, loved, revered, loyally served. It is now fitted for communion with Him.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it” (Phi 1:6). This verse contains a manifest warning, if an indirect or implied one, against our pressing too far the figure of a “new creation.” “Creation” is an act and not a “work,” a finished or completed object, and not an incomplete and imperfect one. God speaks and it is done, wholly and perfectly done in an instant. The very fact that the Holy Spirit has employed such figures as “begetting” and “birth” to describe the saving work of God in the soul intimates that the reference is only to the *initial* experience of Divine grace. A new life is then imparted, but it requires nurturing and developing. In the verse now before us, we are informed that the great change produced in us is not yet fully accomplished, yea, that it is only just begun. The work of grace is called “good,” because it is so in itself, and because of what it effects: it conforms us to God and fits us to enjoy God. It is termed a “work,” because it is a *continuous process*, which the Spirit carries forward in the saint as long as he is left in this scene.

This good work within the soul is commenced by God, being wrought neither by our will nor our agency. That was the ground of the apostle's persuasion or confidence: that He who had begun this good work would perform or finish it—had it been originated by man, he could have had no such assurance. Not only did God initiate this good work, but He alone continues and perfects it—were it left unto us, it would quickly come to nought. “Will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6) tells us it is not complete in this life. With that should be compared, “them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39): observe carefully, not “have believed” (a past act) to the salvation (a completed deliverance) of the soul, but “who believe [a present act] to the *saving* of the soul”—a continuous process. As Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25), so the Spirit ever exercises an effectual influence within us. The verb for

“finish” is an intensive one, which means to carry forward unto the end. “The LORD *will perfect* that which concerneth me” (Psa 138:8) enunciates the same promise.

“According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Ti 3:5-6). If we followed our inclination, we should essay an exposition of the whole passage (verses 4, 7), but unless we keep within bounds and confine ourselves to what bears directly on our present theme, these articles will be extended too much to suit some of our readers. In this passage, we are shown how the three Persons of the Godhead co-operate in the work of salvation, and that salvation itself has both an experimental and legal side to it. Here we are expressly said to be “saved by” the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit, so that the Christian owes his personal salvation unto *Him* as truly as he does unto the Lord Jesus. Had not the blessed Spirit taken up His abode in this world, the death of Christ would have been in vain. It is by the mediation and merits of His redemptive work that Christ purchased the gift and graces of the Spirit, which are here said to be “shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

The will of the Father is the originating cause of our salvation, the worth of the Son’s redemption, its meritorious cause; and the work of the Spirit, its effectual cause. Experimental salvation is begun in the soul by “the washing of regeneration” (Ti 3:5), when the heart is cleansed from the prevailing love and power of sin and begins to be restored to its pristine purity. And by the “renewing of the Holy Ghost,” that is, the renewing of the soul in the Divine image; or, more particularly, the renewing of the “mind” (Rom 12:2); or, more expressly still, being “renewed in the *spirit of your mind*” (Eph 4:23)—that is, in the *disposition* of it. The whole of which is summed up in the expression, God has given us “a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7), “an understanding, that we may know him” (1Jo 5:20). The mind is renovated and reinvigorated, so that it is capacitated to spiritually discern the things of the Spirit, which the natural man cannot do (1Co 2:14), no matter how well he be educated or religiously instructed.

But that to which we would specially direct the attention of the reader is the present tense of the verbs: “the washing of regeneration, and renewing [not “renewal”] of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:5). Like 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Philippians 1:6, this is another verse which shows that the great change is not completed at the new birth, but is a *continual process*, in course of effectuation. The “good work” which God has begun in the soul—that washing and renewing of the Holy Spirit—proceeds throughout the whole course of our earthly life, and is not consummated until the Redeemer’s return, for it is only then that the saints will be perfectly and eternally conformed to the image of God’s Son. God says of His heritage, “I the LORD do keep it; I will *water it every moment*” (Isa 27:3): it is only by the continuous and gracious influences of the Spirit that the spiritual life is nurtured and developed. The believer is often conscious of his need thereof, and under a sense of it, cries, “Quicken me according to thy word” (Psa 119:154). And God does: for “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2Co 4:16). That “inward man” is termed “the hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4).

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10—quoted from Jer 31:31-34). Without entering into the prophetic bearings of this passage (about which none should speak without humble diffidence), suffice it to say that by the “house of Israel,” we understand “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16)—the whole election of grace—to be here in view. The “I will put” and “I will write” refer to yet another integral part of the great change wrought in God’s people, the reference being to that invincible and miraculous operation of the Spirit which radically transforms the favoured subjects of it. “God articulates with His people. He once wrote His laws *to* them; now He writes His laws *in* them. That is, He will give them understanding to know and believe His laws, memories to retain them, hearts to love and consciences to revere them; He will give them courage to profess, and power to put them into practice: the whole habit and frame of their souls shall be a table and transcript of His laws” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). We are here shown how rebels are made amenable to God. “God calls to us without effect, as long as He speaks to us in no other way than by the voice of man. He indeed teaches us and commands what is right, but He speaks to the deaf; for when we seem to hear aright, our ears are only struck by an empty sound, and the heart, being full of depravity and perverseness, rejects every wholesome doctrine. In short, the Word of God never penetrates into our hearts, for they are iron and stone until they are softened by Him; nay, they have engraved on them a contrary law, for perverse passions reek within, which lead us to rebellion. In vain, then, does God proc-

claim His Law by the voice of men, until He writes it by His Spirit on our hearts; that is, until He frames and prepares us for obedience” (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

“I will...write them in their hearts.” The “heart,” as distinguished from the “mind,” comprises the affections and the will. This is what renders actually effective the former. The heart of the natural man is alienated from God and opposed to His authority. That is why God wrote the Ten Words upon tables of stone: not so much to secure the outward letter of them, as to represent the hardness of heart of the people unto whom they were given. But at regeneration, God takes away the heart of stone and gives “an heart of flesh” (Eze 36:26). Just as the tables of stone received the impression of the finger of God, of the letter and words wherein the Law was contained, so the “heart of flesh” receives a durable impression of God’s laws, the affections and will being made answerable unto the whole revealed will of God and conformed to its requirements: a principle of obedience is imparted, and subjection to the Divine authority is wrought in us.

Here, then, is the grand triumph of Divine grace: a lawless rebel is changed into a loyal subject, enmity against the Law (Rom 8:7) is displaced by love for the Law (Psa 119:97). The heart is so transformed that it now loves God and has a genuine desire and determination to please Him. The renewed heart “*delight[s]* in the law of God” and “*serve[s]* the law of God” (Rom 7:22, 25), it being its very “nature” to do so! Let each reader sincerely ask himself, Is there now that in me which responds to the holy Law of God? Is it truly my longing and resolve to be wholly regulated by the Divine will? Is it the deepest yearning of my soul and the chief aim of my life to honour and glorify Him? Is it my daily prayer for Him to work in me “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13)? Is my acutest grief occasioned when I feel I sadly fail to fully realise my longing? If so, the great change *has been* wrought in me.

