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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE SUCCOURING SAVIOUR

“For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). One of the principal designs of the apostle in this epistle was to elevate and strengthen the faith of the sorely tried and wavering Hebrews—and by parity of reason, all who are weak in grace. The method which he followed in the prosecuting of that end was to set forth the transcendent excellency of Christ, with His good will unto the sons of men. He exhibits at length the perfections of His person, His offices, and His work. He declares Him to be the Son of God (Heb 1:5), who has been made the Heir of all things (Heb 1:2), that He is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person (Heb 1:3). Full demonstration was made of His immeasurable superiority to angels (Heb 1:5-8), yet, so infinite was His condescension and great His love unto those given Him by the Father that He deigned to take a place lower than that occupied by those celestial creatures, yea, “In all things...to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb 2:17). In His offices, He is revealed as the supreme Prophet, the final Spokesman of deity (Heb 1:1-2), as a glorious King (Heb 1:8), as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:17), in His work, as making “reconciliation [literally “propitiation”] for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17), as ever living to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25), as “bringing many sons unto glory” (Heb 2:10).

So amazing was the grace of this august Being that He not only partook of the nature of those He came here to save, but He entered fully into their lot and circumstances, became subject to their infirmities, was tempted in all respects as they are (inward corruptions excepted), shed His precious blood, and died a shameful and accursed death in their stead and on their behalf. And all of this, in order to make manifest the reality and abundance of His mercy unto sinners, fire their hearts, and draw out the affections of believers unto Him. In the words quoted above, the apostle points out one of the blessed consequences of the Son’s having become incarnate and entered into fellowship with His suffering people.

First, the Lord of glory came down into the realm of temptation. Scripture is always to be understood in its widest possible latitude, and therefore, “tempt” is to be taken here as signifying put to the proof, subjected to trials and troubles, solicited unto evil. Christ was tempted by God, by men, by the devil. Second, He “suffered” while being tempted. Those temptations were not mere shows or make-beliefs, but real and painful. It could not be otherwise, for not only did He partake of all human sensibilities, but His holiness felt acutely every form of evil. Third, the remembrance of His sufferings makes Him the more mindful of ours.

“For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). Let us consider, first, the timeliness and preciousness of those words to those unto whom they were originally addressed. The Hebrew saints were Jews who had been converted in the days of Christ and under the preaching of the apostles, and were in peculiarly trying circumstances. Their unconverted countrymen regarded them as apostates from Moses, and therefore, from JEHOVAH Himself. They would have no fellowship with them, but instead, regarded them with the utmost contempt and treated them most cruelly. This resulted in great distress and privation, so that they “endured a great fight of afflictions,” were “made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions,” even to “the spoiling of their goods” (Heb 10:32-34), because of their continued loyalty to Christ. Hence, they were strongly tempted to abandon the Christian profession, resume their former place under Judaism, and thereby escape further trouble. Now, it was unto believers in such a situation that our text was addressed. The apostle reminds them that Christ Himself was severely tempted, that He was subjected to worse trials than ours, yet, that He endured the same and emerged a victorious Overcomer. Then, he assured them that the Saviour was able to sustain, comfort, and strengthen them.

Though few Christians today be in identical circumstances with those oppressed Hebrews, many *are* in trying situations. The world hates them, and does so in proportion to their fidelity and conformity unto Christ. Some are treated harshly by ungodly relatives. Some suffer at the hands of graceless professors. Others are experiencing divine chastisement or perplexing providences, or are passing through the waters of bereavement or a painful sickness. And at such times, Satan is particularly active, launching upon them his fiercest attacks, tempting them in various ways. Well, dear friend, here is relief—real, present, all-sufficient relief. Turn your heart and eye to the Saviour, and consider how well-qualified He is to succour you. He is clothed with our humanity, and therefore capable of being “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). The experiences through which He passed fit Him to pity us. He knows all about your case, fully understands your trials, and gauges the strength of your temptation. He is no indifferent spectator, but full of compassion. He wept by the grave of Lazarus (Joh 11:35), and He is the same today as He was yesterday. He is faithful in responding to the appeals of His people.

“He is able to succour” (Heb 2:18) no matter what form the temptation or trial takes. “Succour” is quite a comprehensive word. It means to befriend, to assist those in need, to strengthen the weak. But the Greek term is even more striking and beautifully expressive. It signifies to hasten in response to a cry of distress, literally to “run in to the call” of another. Chrysostom (c. 347-407) interpreted it, “He gives out His hand unto them with all readiness.” A blessed illustration thereof is seen in the case of Christ stretching forth His

hand and catching hold of Peter as he was beginning to sink in the sea (Mat 14:30-31). That was the Saviour succouring one of His own. The same tender benevolence was yet more fully exemplified in Luke 10:33-35, where we behold Him as the good Samaritan tending the wounded traveler. "He is *able*"—the Greek word implies both a fitness and a willingness to do a thing. Christ is alike competent and ready to undertake for His people. There is no unwillingness in Him—the straitness is always in us. "He is *able* to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Heb 7:25) signifies readiness as well as ability.

During His sojourn upon this earth, was He not ever ready to heal diseased bodies? And think you that He is now unwilling to minister unto distressed souls? Perish the thought. He was always at the disposal of the maimed, the blind, the palsied, yea, of the repellent leper, too. He was ever prepared, uncomplainingly, to relieve suffering, though it cost Him something—"There went virtue out of him" (Luk 6:19)—and though there was much unbelief expressed by those who were befriended. As it was then a part of His mission to heal the sick, so it is now a part of His ministry to bind up the broken-hearted. What a Saviour is ours! The almighty God, the all-tender Man. One who is infinitely above us in His original nature and present glory, yet, One who became flesh and blood, lived on the same plane as we do, experienced the same troubles, suffered as we—though far more acutely. Then, how well qualified is He to supply your every need! Meditate much upon these things. Waver not in a childlike confidence in Him. Cast all your care upon Him, knowing that He cares for you.

Whatever be your case or circumstances, the succouring Saviour is all-sufficient and enters sympathetically into your condition. He knew what it was to be bodily weary (Joh 4:6) and exhausted (Mar 4:36-38). He knew what it was to suffer hunger and thirst. Are you homeless? When here, *He* had not where to lay His head (Mat 8:20). Are you in straitened circumstances? *He* was cradled in a manger (Luk 2:7). Are you grief stricken? *He* was the Man of sorrows (Isa 53:3). Are you misunderstood by fellow believers? So was *He*, by His own disciples (Mat 15:16). Whatever be your lot, He can enter fully into it. He experienced all the miseries of mankind, and has not forgotten the same. Are you assailed by Satan? So was He. Do blasphemous thoughts at times torment your mind? The devil tempted Him idolatrously to worship him. Are you in such desperation as to think of making an end of yourself? Satan challenged Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, sin excepted" (Heb 4:15).

Angels may pity, but they can have no fellow feeling. But Christ's compassion (to suffer with) moves Him to succour. In some instances, He does so *before* the temptation comes, and that in a variety of ways. He prepares for it by forewarning of the same, as with Israel being afflicted in Egypt (Gen 15:13), and Paul (Act 9:16). In our case, by causing His providences to presage the same, by fitting us for them, as Christ was anointed with the Spirit ere the devil tempted Him, or by melting the heart with a sense of His goodness, which moves us to say, "How can I do this great wickedness?" (Gen 39:9). He succours *under* temptation. In some cases, by the powerful application of a precept or promise, which, as a cable, holds the heart fast amid the storm—by a providential interposition which prevents our executing the evil intention, or by removing the temptation itself—by giving us to prove the sufficiency of His grace (2Co 12:9). He succours *after* temptation—

by giving us a spirit of contrition (Luk 22:61-62), moving us to confess our sins. And as angels ministered unto Him after His conflict with Satan, so He ministers unto us. Then, no matter how dire your situation or acute your suffering, apply to Christ for relief and deliverance, and count upon His help. It is when the child is most ill that the mother comes and sits beside it, Isaiah 66:13!

EXPOSITION OF JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

39. Righteousness (2:29)

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.”

Summary: “Abide in him”

“And now, little children” (verse 28): in view of all that I have said from verse 12 onwards and especially from verse 18, let me summarize in this one word, “Abide in him.” Give continued evidence of your loyalty to Christ. Make Him the grand object of your hearts, the center of your affections, the One with whom you converse daily. Follow the example He has left you. Seek all your joy in Him. Endeavour to become better established in His doctrine. Strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. It is of the utmost importance that you do so; nothing will so effectually preserve you from error as to keep your hearts and minds fixed on the Lord Jesus. As John Calvin (1509-1564) remarked, “Faith is not a naked and frigid apprehension of Christ, but a lively and real sense of His power, which produces confidence.” The Greek word for “confidence” here literally means liberty of utterance, free-spokenness, as may be seen from its force in Acts 4:13, 29, 31 and 2 Corinthians 3:12. They who abide in Christ, who commune regularly with Him, have freedom of approach and liberty of speech at the throne of grace, for assurance of heart is ever the effect of true piety. “Hence it is that the godly calmly wait for Christ, nor do they dread His coming” (Calvin).

All who trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who genuinely endeavour to live unto Christ, die in Him (Heb 11:13; 1Th 4:14). They shall be raised by Him and be made “like Him” (1Jo 3:2), conformed to the image of God’s Son, glorified (Rom 8:29-30). They will meet Him with confidence and joy, for He is the One they most of all desire to behold. But different far will be the attitude and demeanour of those spoken of in verse 19, and all like unto them. Those who originally made profession of faith in Christ, but who turned away from Him unto His enemies, abandoning Him in order to follow the course of this world, will in the day of His appearing shrink from Him with terror and horror. They will be “ashamed before him at his coming” (2:28), ashamed of their infidelity, of their mad policy, of their wretched choice of forsaking the living Fountain for cisterns that hold no water (Jer 2:13). Literally, “ashamed *from* him,” their guilty consciences causing them to shrink from His holy presence. They will be put to the utmost confusion and dishonour.

The word occurs again in Luke 16:3 and Philippians 1:20. But, blessed be God, it is written, "Whosoever believeth on him shall *not* be ashamed" (Rom 9:33).

Verse 28

"*And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*" (verse 28). That admits of two distinct interpretations, though the one by no means necessarily excludes the other. *First*, the "we" may legitimately be regarded as John speaking of himself and his fellow ministers as believers, taking his place alongside those for whom he wrote, intimating thereby that he was himself following the same course, and prescribed for himself what he did for them—as he included himself personally in the "we" of 1:6, 8-9, etc. *Second*, the "we" of 2:28 may also be fairly considered as referring to himself and others as the servants of God—as in 1:1-4, he alludes to himself and his fellow apostles officially. In support of this is the significant change of person from the second to the first. In verses 20-27 he had uniformly used the "ye," as a teacher instructing his disciples. He might well have kept to that form of address—he does return to it in the very next verse: "If ye know that he is righteous." In what immediately follows, John had the ultimate in view: the great day of reckoning when as a minister of Christ he would be called upon to render an account of his stewardship, particularly concerning those who, under God, he had begotten through the Gospel (1Co 4:15).

Looked at from the latter standpoint, verse 28 is to be regarded both as the climax of the entire passage and as an affecting appeal to the divine love in the saints. Quite a number of weighty reasons and strong inducements had been set before the Lord's people to turn a deaf ear unto all false teachers, and remain steadfast in their allegiance to Christ. And now they are informed that it is not only to their advantage and security so to do, but in the day to come he will be the gainer thereby: "And now, little children, abide in him; that [in order that] when he shall appear we [your spiritual fathers] may have confidence and not be ashamed [of you] before him at his coming." That interpretation gives added force and pertinency to the tender form of address, "little children." If you give ear to the antichrists and become followers of them, it will be a serious reflection upon us who were responsible for your indoctrination and establishment in the faith; your infidelity would impugn our fidelity. Thus our text is to be considered as a parallel appeal to the one found in John's Second Epistle, and which throws light thereon: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2Jo 1:8).

There is not a little in the New Testament that reveals the special relation that pastors sustain to their children in the faith, and also which clearly intimates that the present conduct of Christians has a close bearing on the minister's approbation and reward by Christ when He shall make good that word, "My reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev 22:12). "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2Co 11:2). He had been an instrument in the Spirit's hand of moving them to give up themselves to the Lord, and take Him as their Husband and Head, and was much concerned that their affections should not be diverted from Christ, or they receive "another gospel" (verse 4). Sustaining such an intimate relation to his converts, Paul was deeply

interested in their spiritual welfare, and longed to present them unto Christ at His judgment-seat as those who had conducted themselves consistently with their dedication to Him, so that it would then appear that his labours on their behalf had not been in vain. As he said elsewhere, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man with wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col 1:28).

The under-shepherds of Christ will be called upon to render an account unto the chief Shepherd of their ministerial stewardship in the day of reckoning, and therefore are the members of their flocks exhorted, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief" (Heb 13:17). Ministers are expressly appointed of God for the guarding of their members from error, and to warn against those sins that endanger the soul. They will have to render an account of how they discharged their duty, used their talents, redeemed their time; whether those committed to their care were built up in the faith, or whether souls were lost through their neglect—the lives of their members will be witnesses for or against them. It is in view of that solemn reckoning in the future that each minister is exhorted, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2Ti 4:1-2)—for in that day his service will either be approved or disapproved by his Master.

Thus, "And now, little children, abide in him; [so] that when he shall appear we may have confidence [His approval], and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Do you be careful how you walk, so that in the day of accounts we may not be put to the blush because you have profited so little from the grace and truth we have ministered unto you. If you give heed to the antichrists, that will be a serious reflection upon us; that we rejoiced over your apparent conversion, baptized you, received you into church fellowship, only for you to fall away and apostatize from the faith. In such a case it would show that our labours were fruitless and our expectations would be disappointed. It would then seem to prove that we had failed to set before you the only preservative from all false doctrine. See here, my readers, the solemn effect of careless walking: it brings reproach on your pastor that he should have such "seals" to his ministry. The apostle longed that both he and they together might "receive a full reward" (2Jo 1:8), which would be the case only if they remained steadfast in the faith and in their obedience to Christ. As Paul also reminded the saints, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1Th 2:19-20, cf. Heb 13:17).

Verse 29

"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (verse 29). There is considerable difference of opinion as to how this verse fits into the framework of the epistle. Scarcely any of the commentators make any serious attempt to show its coherence with that which precedes, regarding it more or less as a detached statement. Robert S. Candlish (1806-1873) considered "The apostle passes to a new thought or theme." Personally, we believe there is a very close connection between the words now

before us and those that we have just finished expounding; yet our recognition of the same will depend largely upon a correct apprehension of the terms used. The opening “if” is not one of doubt, but rather of certainty; it is not the raising of a question, but an appeal to an established fact—having the force of “since,” forasmuch as you are assured that He is righteous. The pronoun has its antecedent in the One the apostle was speaking about in the foregoing verses, namely, Jesus Christ. There He is seen as the One who shall separate the precious from the vile, and as the rewarder of His servants: in a word, as “the righteous judge” (2Ti 4:8), who shall deal faithfully and impartially with every one.

Whereas it is evident and certain that Christ is righteous, it clearly follows that, “*every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.*” He that “doeth righteousness” is a variant of he that “abideth in him”—his abiding in Christ is manifested by submitting to Him, by actually doing His revealed will. Thus verse 29 is a further word of discrimination, the drawing of the line again between gracious and graceless professors. It announces one of the tests by which we may identify the regenerate and distinguish them from the unregenerate, namely, by their conduct, for it is by the fruits which it bears that the tree is known. In sharp contrast with “the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), the renewed child of God walks in obedience to Him, treads “the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psa 23:3), heeding His precepts and keeping His statutes. Verse 29 is very much more than an aphorism or mere abstract doctrinal statement: it is a clearly implied exhortation, bidding us examine the claims of those who profess to be Christians and desire fellowship with us as such. But [in] this criterion of being a doer of righteousness, we are to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious, and thus be delivered from being imposed upon by hypocrites. It scarcely needs pointing out that honesty requires that we first faithfully test ourselves by this rule before we apply it to others.

There has always been a considerable number in Christendom who “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18): those who are well versed in theology, but devoid of any sanctifying effects therefrom; whose heads are filled with orthodox views, but whose hearts and lives are unaffected thereby. And John was very anxious to preserve the saints from wasting their affections upon those who were not entitled to the same. He would have them equipped to distinguish clearly between those who were for Christ and those who (despite their pretensions to the contrary) were against Him. He would have them know that there is a radical difference between the righteous and the unrighteous, so that they should walk in separation from the latter. All through his epistle he is most insistent on segregating the one from the other (1:6-7; 2:3-5, 9-11; 3:10, etc.). Here again in our text the apostle draws the picture of a real child of God; that there may be no mistaking him, he adds to the statement that he who has received the Spirit and abides in Christ is also a doer of righteousness. It therefore follows that those who are thoroughly worldly and carnal in their walk are not born of Christ. The unrighteous must not be regarded as righteous!

“*He is righteous.*” We are more apt to think of Christ as gracious and compassionate, merciful and tender, than righteous; but there is much said in Scripture about His righteousness. As God, He is essentially righteous. As man, He is also perfectly righteous, fulfilling the Law in thought, word, and deed. As Mediator, He was righteous in faithfully discharging His commission and finishing the work given Him to do. He is the Author of that everlasting righteousness which is revealed in the Gospel and received by faith. In

Isaiah 11:5, it was announced, “Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” In Old Testament times God spoke of Him as “My righteous servant” (Isa 53:11), as “a righteous Branch” (Jer 23:5), as “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2). By the spirit of prophecy Christ declared, “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation” (Psa 40:9). How righteously He dealt with the rich young ruler, exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, reproved His own disciples, accepted the awful cup in Gethsemane! Verily, He was the Lamb without blemish and without spot. When the Father crowned Him with glory and honour He bore testimony to Christ, “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness” (Psa 45:7). He is the antitypical “King of righteousness” (Heb 7:2). He is expressly declared to be “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1). And by amazing grace believers own Him as “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6), for He has wrought out for them and covered them with the “robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10).

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.” It has been objected by those who ought to know better that the “he” cannot here refer to Christ, because nowhere else in Scripture is regeneration ascribed to the Son. Even were that the case, the objection would have no real validity—as well deny that it was “through the eternal Spirit” that Christ offered Himself without spot to God, because nowhere else are we told so except in Hebrews 9:14. But our text is by no means the sole passage where, by clear implication at least, Christ is represented as the Author of the new birth. He is denominated “the everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6), and says “Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me” (Isa 8:18, and cf. Heb 2:13). God expressly declared of the Saviour, “He shall see his seed,” yea, that “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:10-11)—what are that “seed” and “travail of his soul” but those who are “born of him”? As the Son Himself declared, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 12:24). It is by Christ that we are given the power of privilege “to become the sons of God” (Joh 1:12)

The saving operations of God are ascribed to each of the Persons in the Trinity. In one passage we are said to be justified “by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:11), though elsewhere that is predicated of the Father (Rom 5:1) and of Christ (Act 13:39). So too the new birth is attributed equally to the Spirit (Joh 3:6), to the Father (Jam 1:18), and to Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10), the new spiritual nature being derived from Him as His “seed” (Psa 22:30). Nor is it at all strange that John should here attribute our new birth immediately¹ to Christ. His chief design in the whole of the context is to exalt Him in the esteem of His redeemed, to evince how deeply indebted they are to Him, and to emphasize the intimate and spiritual oneness which there is between Him and them. Christ is our Advocate with the Father (verse 1). He is the Propitiation for our sins (verse 2). He is our Exemplar (verse 6). He is our Anointer (verse 27). He is the Rewarder of our works (verse 28). And [here] He is the Author of our regeneration. The last mentioned supplies yet a further link with the context, furnishing as it does an additional reason or argument in support of the injunction to constancy. To “abide in him” is enforced first by the consideration of the great day of accounts, and

¹ **immediately** – directly, without the help of someone or something.

second by the consideration of the dignity of those called upon to be faithful to Him: they are His dear children.

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.” The twofold “ye know” is closely related to the repeated “teacheth you of all things” and “hath taught you” of verse 27. The anointing Spirit communicates a spiritual judgment and discernment, enabling its possessor to perceive that which is hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own esteem. It imparts a true knowledge of Christ and the ability to identify their brethren and sisters in Him. Until we have a true concept of Christ’s character, we cannot form a just opinion of those who are His. But further, the anointing Spirit ensures an abiding in Christ, and it is the doing of righteousness that is the visible proof and practical fruit of such abiding—for doing righteousness is a complying with His revealed will. It was so with the Son Himself: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (Joh 15:10). It was by walking in full subjection to the Father that Christ demonstrated His Sonship. In the case of the Christian, this knowledge is first *objective*—apprehended from the Scriptures; then *subjective*—realized in experience; then *influential*—expressing itself in the doing of righteousness; and therefore *evidential*—supplying proof of the new birth.

In our text then, the apostle enunciates the simple but obvious principle: that like produces like, that it is an unvarying law of creation that everything should bring forth “after his kind” (Gen 1:11). That there must be and is a reproduction of the parent in the child, was taught plainly by our Lord: concerning Himself, “the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (Joh 5:19). To the Jews He said, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” And again, “If God were your Father, ye would love me”—nature and conduct *must* correspond. It did so in their case: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:39, 42, 44). Since Christ be righteous, those born of Him are righteous; the members are conformed to their Head in nature, character, and conduct. But the emphasis is here placed first on what they do, rather than on what they are, the one serving to make manifest the other.

Instead of arguing from cause to effect, as in “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit” (Mat 7:17), the apostle reasons from actions back to principles. Where there are righteous works, there must be a righteous principle producing them. Since none of the fallen sons of men be righteous by nature, then the presence of righteous works evinces that the producer has been made a partaker of “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). On the one hand, regeneration is the foundation of all righteousness in the soul, being that which inducts us into the kingdom of God (Joh 3:3), when divine power gives us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2Pe 1:3). On the other hand, a righteous walk is one of the visible marks of a new birth, for we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10). The emphasis is placed here on the latter because it is the testing of profession that is in view, the drawing of the line between the real and the false. He “doeth righteousness” not in order to be saved, but in demonstration of the fact that Christ has saved him. Only those who bear Christ’s image

and walk before Him in the ways of righteousness are born of Him. Those who give no evidence of so doing are either deliberate hypocrites or utterly deluded souls.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

91. Pledges Honoured

“Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh” (Jos 22:1). The opening, “Then,” looks back to Jos 21:43-45, where there is a brief but blessed summing up of all that is recorded in the foregoing chapters, “And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.” Therein we behold His unchanging faithfulness—notwithstanding their wilderness provocations, He brought them into Canaan. Therein we have exhibited the perfect harmony which there is between God’s words and His works, which are wonderful not only in contrivance, but equally so in their execution. Therein we learn how sure is the fulfilment of divine prophecy. Every detail predicted was literally accomplished.

The Lord had promised to give the land of Canaan unto Abram’s seed for a possession (Gen 12:7), and He had now done so. He promised to make Abram’s seed a prolific and numerous one (Gen 13:16), and they “multiplied and grew” (Exo 1:12), so that by the time they left Egypt a single family had become “about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, besides children” (Exo 12:37). The Lord promised to preserve them in all places whither they went (Gen 28:15), and He had done so—in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and throughout all their wilderness journeyings. He promised to bring into Canaan the fourth generation of Abram’s descendants after their sojourn in Egypt (Gen 15:16), and a close examination of Exodus 6:16-28, proves that so it came to pass. The Lord promised to give them success in their fighting, “I will send my fear before thee (cf. Jos 2:9), and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee...for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand” (Exo 23:27, 31), and so their sons acknowledged (Psa 44:3). He promised to deliver “kings” into their hands (Deu 7:24), and Joshua 10:24, 40 attests that He did so. He promised to give them “rest” in the land (Deu 12:10), and we are told “the LORD gave them rest” (Jos 21:44).

There were indeed some of the original inhabitants still left in the land to test and try God’s people, but at the close of the seven-year campaign, all open conflict had ceased. The whole of Canaan had now been given by divine lot unto Abram’s descendants. The greater part of it was then occupied by the different tribes, and they were peacefully settled in their heritage. If they continued to obey the Lord and count upon His enablement, they should still more completely possess their possessions. “There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel.” Such will be the triumphant

testimony of the whole Church collectively and of every Christian individually. In due season shall all that God has promised the spiritual Israel come to pass, with regard both to their present comfort and future felicity. All will be accomplished, exactly and perfectly, as God has declared, for all His promises are in Christ yea and amen (2Co 1:20). At the last, when the whole company of the redeemed will have entered their eternal rest and inheritance, they will bear joyous witness that “He hath done all things well.”

“Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh” (Jos 22:1). The passage which opens with those words contains the sequel to what is recorded at some length in Numbers 32. There we read, “Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle...came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying...the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle; wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan” (Num 32:1-5). They referred to the land which had formerly been occupied by Sihon and Og, whose forces Israel had, under God, completely destroyed, and whose territory they then seized by right of victory (Num 21:21-35). Lying in the Jordan valley, the ground was well watered, and ideal for pasturage.

For several months, the camp of Israel had remained stationary on the plains of Moab: looking backward to the house of bondage from which they had been delivered; looking forward to the land of Canaan which had been promised them for their inheritance. Behind them lay the dreary desert, before them was the river of Jordan. In view of the mentioning of “the princes of the congregation” (Num 32:2) in addition to Eleazar, it would appear that an official conference of the Sanhedrin, or chief counsel of the nation, was being held—perhaps over the disposing of the territory which had been acquired by their recent victory. The language used by the spokesman of the two tribes also conveys the impression that their request was of the nature of a formal petition. It was to the effect that they should be given the title to settle in the luxurious valley of Jazer and Gilead. There was nothing underhand or stealthy in the appeal which they made, but an honourable and open approach unto the heads of authority, and in a meek and modest spirit, as their “if we have found grace in thy sight” (Num 32:5) evinces. Notwithstanding, the commentators generally condemn their action.

It is concluded by some that their conduct was very blameworthy. That they showed contempt of Canaan, or, if not that, were following the line of least resistance in wanting to remain where they were, and thus, escape the hardships and fighting which the crossing of the Jordan would involve. Others see in their proposal a display of covetousness, a greedy desire to make this fertile portion their own. Still others charge them with being lacking in public spirit, putting their own private interests before the common good of the nation. Personally, we see nothing definite in the narrative to support such views, but rather some things to the contrary. Had their request been as reprehensible as these critics make out, they had been promptly informed of its *unlawfulness*, and there the matter would have terminated. Most certainly the Lord had never confirmed it! God had already delivered this land into the hands of Israel, and someone must inherit and inhabit it. It was particularly

suiting for pasturage, and *that* was what these tribes, with their “very great multitude of cattle” (Num 32:1), most needed. Nor were they despising the Lord’s inheritance, for the boundary of Canaan was not the Jordan, but rather the mountain-range of Gilead, which separated it from the desert lying beyond. Thus, as Joshua 22:9 shows, the section desired by these tribes was as much *within* Canaan as was the land on the farther side of the Jordan.

Moses was thoroughly displeased with their suggestion, placing the worst construction upon it. He supposed that their request proceeded from a spirit of cowardice and sloth. He considered that they were giving way to unbelief, distrusting God’s power, seeking to shelve their responsibility (Num 35:6). In any case, it would mean the weakening of Israel’s army by a reduction of at least one fifth of its manpower. Moreover, they were asking him to establish a dangerous precedent, which others might desire to follow (Num 35:7). He recalled the faint-heartedness of their fathers, and the disastrous sequel which had attended the same (Num 35:8-9). He feared that their attitude would bring down the Lord’s wrath upon the whole congregation (Num 35:14). But his suspicions were unwarranted, and his fears unnecessary.

“And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones: but we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward” (Num 32:16-19). Thus did they show how grievously Moses had misjudged them, and how unfounded were his surmisings. They had no intention of sitting still while the other tribes went to war. Without murmuring or disputing, they expressed a willingness to share their brethren’s burden. So far from being afraid to enter the field against the enemy, they were prepared to take the lead and go “before the children of Israel” (Num 32:17). They would remain with their fellows until all of them were duly settled. Nor would they require any compensation or expect to receive any share of the spoils.

Satisfied with their explanation and assurances, Moses conditionally granted their request. Holding them to their promises, he agreed to the proposal on their fulfilment of its terms. If they carried out their part of the contract, the land of Jazer and Gilead should be their “possession before the Lord” (Num 32:22). But if they went back upon their word, then they would be offending against God Himself, and in such an event, their sin was certain to find them out (Num 32:23), which signifies that bitter and inevitable would be the consequences, and not discovered or brought to light. “Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth” (Num 32:25) was their ready response and solemn vow. Thereupon the agreement was formally and publicly ratified before Israel’s supreme court, Joshua (who was to succeed him) being expressly informed of the compact (Num 32:28), according to the terms of which the coasts and cities of Sihon and Og became the possession of the two and a half tribes (Num 32:33). Thus did they strikingly prefigure the Old Testament saints, who entered into their spiritual inheritance during the Mosaic economy.

When Joshua took over the leadership, he addressed himself to the two and a half tribes thus, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land," and then detailed the stipulated conditions of this provisional arrangement (Jos 1:12-15). As we pointed out in the ninth article of this series, Joshua was acting here not on the ground of natural prudence, but in obedience to his Master's will. The Lord had bidden him to "observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee" (Jos 1:7), and *this* was one of those things (Num 32:28)! Thus, the new head of the nation did not take it for granted that they would carry out their agreement, but definitely reminded them of the same and held them to it. It is blessed, too, to observe the ground upon which he appealed to them. It was neither as a personal favour to himself for their co-operation, nor as an encouragement unto their brethren, but as an act of obedience, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you" (Jos 1:13).

Equally blessed is it to hear their response, "And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee" (Jos 1:16-17). Thus did they solemnly and explicitly renew their agreement; and, as the sequel demonstrates, it was no idle boast that they made. It is ever God's way to honour those who honour Him: Joshua had given Him His proper place by complying with his commission and magnifying God's Word, and now the Lord graciously inclined these two and a half tribes willingly to serve under him. In his, "until the LORD have given your brethren rest...and they also have possessed the land" (Jos 1:15), he expressed his unwavering faith in the successful outcome of the campaign, and here the Lord moved these men to give him their full support. They averred their willingness to accept him as their commander and yield full obedience to his authority.

Faithfully did they fulfill their part of the agreement, "And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: about forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho" (Jos 4:12-13). How the Holy Spirit delights to record the obedience of saints! And now we come to the happy sequel to the whole of the above, "Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God" (Jos 22:2-3). A real tribute of praise was that, and a signal proof of the magnanimity of the one who paid it. Though they had only discharged a manifest obligation and fulfilled their part of the contract, it cost Joshua nothing to acknowledge their fidelity and commend their obedience, and such a word from their general would mean much to them.

They had given further proof of the sterling quality of their character by submitting to the authority of Joshua. They might have pleaded that their agreement had been made with *Moses*, and that, since death cancels all contracts, his decease relieved them of their engagement. But having put their hand to the plough, they refused to look back (Luk 9:62). Or, to change the figure, they conducted themselves in a manner that was in every respect

the very opposite of that of the Ephraimites at a later date, of whom we read that they “turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law” (Psa 78:9-10). Alas, how the courage of many who enlist under the banner of Christ fails them in the day of testing, so that they retreat before the foe, and in the hour of temptation, prove false to their good resolutions and solemn promises and vows. Different far was it with these Reubenites and Gadites. Not only did they begin well, but they also endured unto the end. Yea, their wholehearted devotion to the cause of God and His people *increased*, for a comparison of Joshua 1:16 with Numbers 32:31, reveals that the promise which they made unto Joshua went beyond that which they had pledged unto Moses.

For seven years, they had served obediently under Joshua, had disinterestedly put the welfare of the nation before their own private comforts, had made no attempt to rejoin their families, but had remained by the side of their brethren until Canaan was conquered. Most commendable was their meekness in waiting for their dismissal. They did not chafe at the delay, but were submissive to their leader’s will. Instead of seeking out Joshua and complaining that it was high time for them to return to their homes, they quietly tarried for Him to take the initiative in the matter. As another remarked, “Like good soldiers they would not move till they had orders from their general. They had not only done their duty to Joshua and Israel, but, which was best of all, they had made conscience of their duty to God. ‘Ye have kept the charge,’ or, as the word is, ‘Ye have kept the keeping,’ that is, Ye have carefully and circumspectly kept the commandments of the Lord your God, not only in this particular instance of continuing in the service of Israel to the end of the war, but, in general, you have kept up religion in your part of the camp—a rare and excellent thing among soldiers, and which is worthy to be praised” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan” (Jos 22:4). How careful was Joshua to place the crown of honour where it rightly belonged, and ascribe the glory of their victory unto the Author of the same! At the same time, he considered it meet that thankful acknowledgment should be made to those who had assisted him therein. “God must be chiefly eyed in our praises, but instruments must not be altogether overlooked” (Henry). Equally definite was Joshua in here magnifying the fidelity of JEHOVAH, reminding Israel that the successful outcome of their military efforts, and the resultant rest for the whole nation, was the fulfilment of the sure word of the Lord. Having faithfully performed their part of the contract by sharing the hardships and dangers of their brethren, Joshua now made good the assurances which Moses had given to the two and a half tribes, publicly and solemnly granting them an honourable discharge from the army and authorizing them to rejoin their families.

“But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Jos 22:5). Ere dismissing the two and a half tribes, Joshua gave them salutary counsel. No instructions were furnished for the fortifying of their cities or for the cultivation of their land, the whole emphasis being placed upon the regulating of their spiritual lives. Nor was there any lowering of the rule to meet their “moral inability,” but a

strict maintaining of God's claims upon them. "Perfect obedience to the divine Law was no more practicable in the days of Joshua than at present, yet his exhortation takes no notice of this, for the standard of obedience cannot be too high (Mat 5:43-48), nor our aim too high, as we are sure to fall very far short of what we propose for ourselves. But the consciousness of our imperfections subserves the purposes of humiliation, and the feeling of our insufficiency dictates prayers for forgiveness and assistance" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). It is not sufficient that we know God's Law, we are required to *do* it. In order to obedience, we must "take diligent heed." We shall only walk in God's ways to the extent that we serve Him wholeheartedly, for love to Him is the spring of all acceptable obedience and worship.

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

3. *The Scriptures and Christ*

The order we follow in this series is that of *experience*. It is not until man is made thoroughly displeased with himself that he begins to aspire after God. The fallen creature, deluded by Satan, is self-satisfied till his sin-blinded eyes are opened to get a sight of himself. The Holy Spirit first works in us a sense of our ignorance, vanity, poverty and depravity, before He brings us to perceive and acknowledge that in God alone are to be found true wisdom, real blessedness, perfect goodness and unspotted righteousness. We must be made conscious of our imperfections ere we can really appreciate the divine perfections. As the perfections of God are contemplated, man becomes still more aware of the infinite distance that separates him from the Most High. As he learns something of God's pressing claims upon him, and his own utter inability to meet them, he is prepared to hear and welcome the good news that Another has fully met those claims for all who are led to believe in Him.

"Search the scriptures," said the Lord Jesus, and then He added, "for...they are they which testify *of me*" (Joh 5:39). They testify of Him as the only Saviour for perishing sinners, as the only Mediator between God and men, as the only One through whom the Father can be approached. They testify to the wondrous perfections of His person, the varied glories of His offices, the sufficiency of His finished work. Apart from the Scriptures, He cannot be known. In them alone, He is revealed. When the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto His people, in thus making known to the soul, He uses naught but what is written. While it is true that Christ is the key to the Scriptures, it is equally true that only in the Scriptures do we have an opening-up of the "mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4).

Now, the measure in which we profit from our reading and study of the Scriptures may be ascertained by the extent to which *Christ* is becoming more real and more precious unto our hearts. To "grow in grace" is defined as "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). The second clause there is not something in addition to

the first, but is an explanation of it. To “know” Christ (Phi 3:10) was the supreme longing and aim of the apostle Paul, a longing and an aim to which he subordinated all other interests. But, mark it well, the “knowledge” which is spoken of in these verses is not intellectual, but spiritual, not theoretical, but experimental, not general, but personal. It is a supernatural knowledge, which is imparted to the regenerate heart by the operations of the Holy Spirit, as He interprets and applies to us the Scriptures concerning Him.

Now, the knowledge of Christ which the blessed Spirit imparts to the believer through the Scriptures profits him in different ways, according to his varying frames, circumstances, and needs. Concerning the bread which God gave to the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, it is recorded that “some gathered more, some less” (Exo 16:17). The same is true in our apprehension of Him of whom the manna was a type. There is that in the wondrous person of Christ which is exactly suited to our every condition, every circumstance, every need, both for time and eternity. But we are slow in realizing it, and slower still to act upon it. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Christ (Joh 1:16) which is available for us to draw from, and the principle regulating the extent to which we become “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1) is, “according unto your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29).

1. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they reveal to him *his need of Christ*. Man, in his natural estate, deems himself self-sufficient. True, he has a dim perception that all is not quite right between himself and God, yet has he no difficulty in persuading himself that *he* is able to do that which will propitiate Him. *That* lies at the foundation of all man’s “religion,” begun by Cain, in whose “way” (Jude 11) the multitudes still walk. Tell the devout religionist that, “They that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom 8:8), and he is at once offended. Press upon him the fact that, “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6), and his hypocritical urbanity at once gives place to anger. So it was when Christ was on earth. The most religious people of all, the Jews, had no sense that *they* were “lost” and in dire need of an almighty Saviour.

“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Mat 9:12). It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit, by His application of the Scriptures, to convict sinners of their desperate condition, to bring them to see that their state is such that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” in them, but “wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isa 1:6). As the Spirit convicts us of our sins—our ingratitude to God, our murmuring against Him, our wanderings from Him—as He presses upon us the claims of God—His right to our love, obedience, and adoration, and all our sad failures to render Him His due—then are we made to recognize that Christ is our only hope, and that, except we flee to Him for refuge, the righteous wrath of God will most certainly fall upon us.

Nor is this to be limited to the initial experience of conversion. The more the Spirit deepens His work of grace in the regenerated soul, the more that individual is made conscious of his pollution, his sinfulness, and his vileness, and the more does he discover his need of and learn to value that precious, precious blood which cleanses from all sin. The Spirit is here to glorify Christ, and one chief way in which He does so is by opening wider and wider the eyes of those for whom He died, to see how suited Christ is for such wretched, foul, hell-deserving creatures. Yes, the more we are truly profiting from our reading of the Scriptures, the more do we feel our need of Him.

2. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they *make Christ more real* to him. The great mass of the Israelitish nation saw nothing more than the outward shell in the rites and ceremonies which God instructed, but a regenerated remnant were privileged to behold Christ Himself. "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" said Christ (Joh 8:56). Moses esteemed "the reproach or Christ" greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (Heb 11:26). So it is in Christendom. To the multitudes, Christ is but a name, or at most a historical character. They have no personal dealings with Him, enjoy no spiritual communion with Him. Should they hear one speak in rapture of His excellency, they regard him as an enthusiast or a fanatic. To them, Christ is unreal, vague, intangible. But with the real Christian, it is far otherwise. The language of his heart is,

"I have heard the voice of Jesus,
Tell me not of aught beside;
I have seen the face of Jesus,
All my soul is satisfied."

Yet such a blissful sight is not the consistent and unvarying experience of the saints. Just as clouds come in between the sun and the earth, so failures in our walk interrupt our communion with Christ and serve to hide from us the light of His countenance. "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" (Joh 14:21). Yes, it is the one who by grace is treading the path of obedience to whom the Lord Jesus grants manifestations of Himself. And the more frequent and prolonged these manifestations are, the more real He becomes to the soul, until we are able to say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; *but now* mine eye *seeth thee*" (Job 42:5). Thus, the more Christ is becoming a living reality to me, the more I am profiting from the Word.

3. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when he becomes *more engrossed with Christ's perfections*. It is a sense of need which first drives the soul to Christ, but it is the realization of His excellency which draws us to run after Him. The more real Christ becomes to us, the more are we attracted by His perfections. At the beginning, He is viewed only as a Saviour, but as the Spirit continues to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, we discover that upon His head are "many crowns" (Rev 19:12). Of old, it was said, "His name shall be called Wonderful" (Isa 9:6). His name signifies all that He is as made known in Scripture. "Wonderful" are His offices, in their number, variety, sufficiency. He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother, to help in every time of need. He is the great High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is the Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause when Satan accuses us.

Our great need is to be occupied with Christ, to sit at His feet as Mary did, and receive out of His fullness. Our chief delight should be to "*Consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our profession" (Heb 3:1)—to contemplate the various relations which He sustains to us, to meditate upon the many promises He has given, to dwell upon His wondrous and changeless love for us. As we do this, we shall so delight ourselves in the Lord that the siren voices of this world will lose all their charm for us. Ah, my reader, do you know anything about this in your own actual experience? Is Christ the chief among ten thousand

to your soul? Has He won your heart? Is it your chief joy to get alone and be occupied with Him? If not, your Bible reading and study has profited you little indeed.

4. An individual is profited from the Scriptures as *Christ becomes more precious* to him. Christ is precious in the esteem of all true believers (1Pe 2:7). They count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord (Phi 3:8). His name to them is an ointment poured forth (Song 1:3). As the glory of God that appeared in the wondrous beauty of the temple, and in the wisdom and splendour of Solomon, drew worshippers to Him from the uttermost parts of the earth, so the unparalleled excellency of Christ, which was prefigured thereby, does more powerfully attract the hearts of His people. The devil knows this full well, therefore is he ceaselessly engaged in blinding the minds of them that believe not, by placing between them and Christ the allurements of this world. God permits him to assail the believer also, but it is written, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam 4:7). Resist him by definite and earnest prayer, entreating the Spirit to draw out your affections to Christ.

The more we are engaged with Christ's perfections, the more we love and adore Him. It is lack of experimental acquaintance with Him that makes our hearts so cold towards Him. But where real and daily fellowship is cultivated, the Christian will be able to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa 73:25). This it is which is the very essence and distinguishing nature of true Christianity. Legalistic zealots may be busily engaged in tithing mint and anise and cumin, they may encompass sea and land to make one proselyte, and yet have no love for God in Christ. It is the heart that God looks at, "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26) is His demand. The more precious Christ is to us, the more delight does He have in us.

5. An individual who is profited from the Scriptures has an *increasing confidence in Christ*. There is "little faith" (Mat 8:26) and "great faith" (Mat 8:10). There is "full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22), and trusting in the Lord "with all the heart" (Pro 3:5). Just as there is growing "from strength to strength" (Psa 84:7), so we read of "from faith to faith" (Rom 1:17). The stronger and steadier our faith, the more the Lord Jesus is honoured. Even a cursory reading of the four Gospels reveals the fact that nothing pleased the Saviour more than the firm reliance which was placed in Him by the few who really counted upon Him. He Himself lived and walked by faith, and the more we do so, the more are the members being conformed to their Head. Above everything else, there is one thing to be aimed at and diligently sought by earnest prayer, that our faith may be increased. Of the Thessalonian saints, Paul was able to say, "Your faith groweth exceedingly" (2Th 1:3).

Now, Christ cannot be trusted at all unless He be known, and the better He is known, the more will He be trusted: "And they that know thy name *will* put their trust in thee" (Psa 9:10). As Christ becomes more real to the heart, as we are increasingly occupied with His manifold perfections and He becomes more precious to us, confidence in Him is deepened until it becomes as natural to trust Him as it is to breathe. The Christian life is a *walk of faith* (2Co 5:7), and that very expression denotes a continual progress, an increasing deliverance from doubts and fears, a fuller assurance that all He has promised He will perform. Abraham is the father of all them that believe, and thus, the record of his life furnishes an illustration of what a deepening confidence in the Lord signifies. First, at His

bare word, he turned his back upon all that was dear to the flesh. Second, he went forth in simple dependence on Him and dwelt as a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise, though he never owned a single acre of it. Third, when the promise was made of a seed in his old age, he considered not the obstacles in the way of its fulfilment, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Finally, when called on to offer up Isaac, through whom the promises were to be realized, he accounted that God was able to “raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb 11:19).

In the history of Abraham, we are shown how grace is able to subdue an evil heart of unbelief, how the spirit may be victorious over the flesh, how the supernatural fruits of a God-given and God-sustained faith may be brought forth by a man of like passions with us. This is recorded for our encouragement, for us to pray that it may please the Lord to work in us what He wrought in and through the father of the faithful. Nothing more pleases, honours and glorifies Christ than the confiding trust, the expectant confidence and the childlike faith of those to whom He has given every cause to trust Him with all their hearts. And nothing more evidences that we are being profited from the Scriptures than an increasing faith in Christ.

6. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they beget in him *a deepening desire to please Christ*. “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price” (1Co 6:19-20) is the first great fact that Christians need to apprehend. Henceforth, they are not to “live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:15). Love delights to please its object, and the more our affections are drawn out to Christ, the more shall we desire to honour Him by a life of obedience to His known will. “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (Joh 14:23). It is not in happy emotions or in verbal professions of devotion, but in the actual assumption of His yoke and the practical submitting to His precepts that Christ is most honoured.

It is at this point particularly that the genuineness of our profession may be tested and proved. Have they a faith in Christ who make no effort to learn His will? What a contempt of the king if his subjects refuse to read his proclamation! Where there is faith in Christ, there will be delight in His commandments, and a sorrowing when they are broken by us. When we displease Christ, we should mourn over our failure. It is impossible seriously to believe that it was my sins which caused the Son of God to shed His precious blood without my hating them. If Christ groaned under sin, we shall too. And the more sincere those groanings be, the more earnestly shall we seek grace for deliverance from all that displeases, and strength to do all that which pleases our blessed Redeemer.

7. An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they cause him to *long for the return of Christ*. Love can be satisfied with nothing short of a sight of its object. True, even now, we behold Christ by faith, yet, it is “through a glass, darkly.” But at His coming, we shall behold Him “face to face” (1Co 13:12). Then will be fulfilled His own words, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). Only this will fully meet the longings of His heart, and only this will meet the longings of those redeemed by Him. Only then will He “see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11), and, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15).

At the return of Christ, we shall be done with sin for ever. The elect are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son, and that divine purpose will be realized only when Christ receives His people unto Himself. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). Never again will our communion with Him be broken. Never again shall we groan and moan over our inward corruptions. Never again shall we be harassed with unbelief. He will present His Church to Himself, "A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph 5:27). For that hour, we eagerly wait. For our Redeemer, we lovingly look. The more we yearn for the coming One, the more we are trimming our lamps in earnest expectation of His coming, the more do we give evidence that we are profiting from our knowledge of the Word.

Let the reader and writer honestly search themselves as in the presence of God. Let us seek truthful answers to these questions. Have we a deeper felt sense of our need of Christ? Is He Himself becoming to us a brighter and living reality? Are we finding increasing delight in being occupied with His lovely perfections? Is Christ Himself becoming daily more precious to us? Is our faith in Him growing so that we confidently trust Him for everything? Are we really seeking to please Him in all the details of our lives? Are we so yearning for Him that we would be filled with joy did we know for certain that He would come during the next twenty-four hours? May the Holy Spirit search our hearts with these pointed questions.

SECURITY

Is it true that when a sinner is really saved by Christ he is safe for ever? Or may he be saved today and lost tomorrow? Different schools of theology have returned an emphatic affirmative to each of these questions, and both refer to the Bible in support of their conflicting contentions. To the writer, it appears that very unwise and unguarded statements have been made by both parties. Some Calvinists have boldly affirmed that if a sinner has truly received Christ as his Saviour, no matter what he does afterwards or what his subsequent life may be, he cannot possibly perish. Some Arminians have placed a question mark against the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and the efficacy of the Spirit's operations by saying that when a sinner repents and believes in Christ, he is merely put on probation, and that his own faithfulness and good works will prove the deciding factor as to whether or not he reaches the promised land.

Endless volumes have been written on the subject, but neither side has satisfied the other. Nor is this surprising! Party spirit runs too high, sectarian prejudice has been too strong. Only too often the aim of the contestants has been to silence their opponent rather than to arrive at the truth. The method followed has frequently been quite unworthy of those professing to be "the children of light." One class of passage has been pressed into service, while another class has been ignored or explained away. Is it not a fact that if some Calvinists were quite frank, they would have to acknowledge that there are some verses in

Scripture which they wish were not there at all? And if some Arminians were equally frank, must they not confess that there are certain statements in the Word which they are unable to fit into the creed to which they are committed?

In the light of theological history, does it not seem evident that the subject of the Christian's security, like every other truth of Holy Writ, must have two sides to it—that there enter into it both God's sovereignty and human responsibility? Perhaps it is failure to recognize and reckon upon this which has caused so much confusion and contention thereon. More than once have we heard a renowned Bible-teacher of orthodox reputation declare, "I do not believe in the perseverance of the saints, but I do believe in the preservation of the Saviour." But why deny the former when the Scriptures have so much to say upon it? Would it not be equally unwarrantable for me to say, "I do not believe that men must breathe in order to live, but I do believe that the Creator gives life so that we shall breathe"? The one exists not without the other. To say that God preserves by causing us to persevere is not to rob Him of His glory by dividing the honours, but is simply to affirm that He deals with us as moral agents.

In declaring that when a sinner repents and trusts in Christ, he is secure for ever, and no matter what his subsequent life may be, he cannot perish, some imagine Christ's faithfulness, power, and grace are greatly magnified. But are *those* His only attributes? What about His righteousness, wisdom, and holiness? Faithfulness would become reckless indulgence if the waywardness of a Christian were winked at. Grace would be disgraced were the requirements of morality flouted. Power would degenerate into "might is right" were the demands of holiness ignored. One of the divine attributes must never be extolled at the expense of another. Grace reigns (i.e. it is regnant, supreme), yet it reigns "through righteousness" (Rom 5:21) and not in defiance of it. As in salvation itself, the wisdom of God is conspicuously exemplified by the wondrous way in which justice and mercy harmonize, so in the securing of the believer, the divine perfections act in perfect consonance.

Are there not many today professing to be Christians whose daily lives differ nothing from thousands of non-professors? They are rarely, if ever, found at the prayer meeting, they have no family worship, they seldom read the Scriptures, they are unwilling to converse on spiritual things, their walk is thoroughly worldly, yet, they are quite sure *they* are bound for heaven. Inquire into the ground of their confidence and they will tell you that so many years ago they accepted Christ as their personal Saviour, and "Once saved always saved" is now their comfort. It is not difficult to anticipate the thoughts of some. True, there are many in Christendom who have never been born again, yet, this in no wise conflicts with the Lord's declaration that none of His sheep shall ever perish. But have we any right to appropriate to ourselves Christ's promise in John 10:28-29 *unless we answer the description* of His sheep in the previous verse, "My sheep *hear* my voice...and they *follow* me" (Joh 10:27)?

The precious truth of divine preservation is designed for the deepening of the Christian's gratitude. It assures him that nothing shall ever separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:35-39). It reveals the blessed fact that the power of God is engaged to protect them from evil and deliver them from their foes (Luk 1:69, 71). What a

song of thanksgiving this should raise in the hearts of the redeemed! This blessed truth is designed as a divine tonic for our drooping spirits. Fighting the good fight of faith, how often the battle seems to be going against us. Were it not for God's promises, we might well be in doubt as to the ultimate issue. Living in a hostile world, Satan and his hosts seeking to bring about our destruction, having no might of our own, despair might well fill our hearts were God to leave us entirely to ourselves. But, blessed be His name, He does not, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and *delivereth* them" (Psa 34:7).

But, like every other truth revealed in Scripture, the divine preservation of the saints is capable of being perverted and "wrested" to men's destruction (2Pe 3:16). Religious hypocrites, empty professors, baptized worldlings, make a wrong use of it, whereby the truth of God is dishonoured. They draw from it a peace and joy to which they are not entitled. They assume, without warrant, that they are saved, and though they have none of the marks of regeneration and bear no spiritual fruit, they persuade themselves that God will carry them safely through to glory. Satan has deceived them into thinking that some years ago they savingly believed in Christ, and, assured that the Bible teaches "None can fall from grace and be lost," they go on in carnal confidence, from which it is to be feared many are never aroused till they awake in hell.

Now, God Himself has *safeguarded* this truth of divine preservation by inseparably linking with it the complementary truth of human perseverance. Nowhere has God promised to preserve anyone while he is following a course of self-will and self-pleasing. It is not in the path of fleshly indulgence and conformity to this world, but in the highway of holiness that the protecting grace of God is to be found. If I drink poison, no praying will deliver me from its deadly effects. If I neglect the means of grace, then my soul will starve. If I wickedly presume upon God's mercy and expect Him to shield me when I deliberately run into the place of temptation, then I shall be justly left to reap as I have sown. "*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed*" (Joh 8:31); "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for *if ye do these things, ye shall never fall*" (2Pe 1:10). "*If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father*" (1Jo 2:24).

It needs to be steadily borne in mind that the Christian is yet *in the place of danger*. It is this which gives force to the *warnings* of Scripture. There are certain danger-signals which the Spirit has set up, and which it is the part of wisdom for us duly to heed. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die" (Rom 8:13). This informs us what will be the end should a certain line of conduct be persevered in. "Be not highminded, *but fear*: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee" (Rom 11:20-21). "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal 6:7-8).

It may be objected that such a pressing of the duty of perseverance and such a calling intention to these warnings are quite unnecessary where *real* Christians are concerned. That all those truly born again *will* persevere, and therefore, it is pointless to *urge* them to do so. Not so did the apostles think and act. "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” (Act 11:22-23). And again, “They returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, *and exhorting them to continue* in the faith” (Act 14:21-22).

To sum up, Scripture teaches no mechanical security wherein God deals with men as with sticks and stones. No, it calls upon believers to “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12). God preserves His people in a way consistent with His holiness, and in a manner that enforces the discharge of their responsibility, namely, by moving them to *use* the provided means of grace, and *avoid* those things which have a fatal tendency. Christians are “kept by the power of God,” but the very next words tell us *how* He keeps them, “through faith” or “faithfulness” (1Pe 1:5).

WHOLEHEARTED TRUST

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart” (Pro 3:5)

One of the principal differences between the book of Psalms and the book of Proverbs is this—in the former, we hear, for the most part, the saints addressing God, praising and petitioning Him. In the latter, it is God addressing His people, giving counsels for their walk. Though there is not a little in the book of Proverbs which is, in its ultimate scope (veiled) prophecy, yet its first application is of a practical nature, containing divine precepts for the regulation of every branch of our earthly lives. In Proverbs 3:5-6 is found a word which is of great importance and value for our souls. Its weighty language impresses us at once, and the more it is prayerfully pondered, the more will the anointed eye discern the divine wisdom which dictated it. It falls into four parts, to each of which we purpose devoting a separate article.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.” As the opening words of Proverbs 3 plainly intimate, the contents of this chapter are addressed directly to the children of God. What, then, is the first implication of our present text? Surely, a very humbling one—that we *need* such an admonition—that we have to be told to, “Trust in the LORD.” One had thought it were as natural for a Christian to trust in the Lord as it is to breathe. Alas, our experience has shown us otherwise. The sad and awful fact is that we are readier to trust in anyone, yea, in anything, rather than in the living God. That is why we need exhorting, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.”

But exactly what is meant by, “Trust in the LORD”? The Hebrew verb literally means to “lean upon.” It conveys the idea of one who is conscious of feebleness and so turns and rests upon a stronger one for support. It presupposes confidence in and reliance upon the Lord. To “Trust in the LORD” means to count upon Him in every emergency, to look to Him for the supply of every need, to say with the Psalmist, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” To “Trust in the LORD” means to expect confidently the fulfilment of His

every promise, in His own good time and way. It means that we cast all our care upon Him, drawing from Him strength day by day and hour by hour, and thus proving the sufficiency of His grace. Thus, to “Trust in the LORD” means for the Christian *to continue* even as he commenced!

When we first really turned to the Lord, conscious of our deep and desperate need, how did we act? We repudiated all confidence in self, abandoned all our own doings, and cast ourselves upon Him as our only hope and confidence. Now, just as we acted when we first came to Him for salvation, so should we daily rely on Him for all needed wisdom, strength, and grace.

But what is meant by trust in the Lord “with all thine heart”? I think three things are chiefly intended. First, it means giving unto God our *undivided* confidence, not looking to any other for help and relief. It was at this point that Judah failed of old. Hear JEHOVAH’S complaint against her, “And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD” (Jer 3:10). A parallel to our text is found in that word, “Wait thou *only* upon God” (Psa 62:5). Second, it means *with child-like simplicity*. You know how a little child trusts. There is no reasoning. He simply takes his parents’ words at their face value, and has implicit confidence that his father will make good what he has said. He dwells not on the difficulties in the way, but expects a fulfilment of what is promised. So it should be with us and our heavenly Father’s words. Third, it means with our *affection* going out to Him. As we read in 1 Corinthians 13:7, love “believeth all things, hopeth all things.” Thus, to trust in the Lord with all our heart is love’s reliance. It is the affections going out to Him in believing dependency and expectation.

It is blessed to ponder a number of examples, recorded in Scripture for our encouragement, of men who did trust in the Lord with all their hearts. Abraham upon Mount Moriah is a case in point. He had received commandment to take his well-beloved son and present him to JEHOVAH as a burnt offering. His response evidenced not only his obedience, but his wholehearted trust or confidence in God. The Lord had said, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen 21:12). But how could that be, if he were slain? Instead of leaning unto his own understanding, he fully trusted in the Lord, and left Him to harmonize His promise with His precepts.

Another illustration equally striking, though perhaps less known, is found in the response made by Hezekiah to the threatening letter he had received from the king of Assyria. A most critical situation confronted him. That heathen monarch aspired to world conquest. One kingdom after another had fallen before him; now he blatantly threatened Israel. What was Hezekiah’s response? Did he wring his hands in despair? No. What then? Did he confer with his generals, or set about strengthening his army? No, instead, “Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD” (2Ki 19:14 and read his prayer in verses 15-19).

An urgent crisis, similar the last, confronted Asa. “There came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah” (2Ch 14:9). It is easy to read this, but endeavour to visualize that vast hostile force. What was the King’s response? This, “And Asa cried unto the LORD his

God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we *rest on thee*, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee” (2Ch 14:11). *That* illustrates and exemplifies our text.

Let us seek now to apply this divine admonition to the details of our daily lives, particularly to the mysteries of providence therein. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Psa 34:19), and some of them are very trying and painful to the flesh. Oftentimes, they bring us to wit’s-end corner. Perhaps our experience is like that of the disciples on the storm-tossed sea. It is dark and the wind is contrary to us. Even so, the call comes, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart” (Pro 3:5). Remember that the winds and the waves obey *His will*.

Or possibly, our circumstances resemble those of Israel at the Red Sea. The enemy threatens at our rear and before us stands a cold and unfriendly ocean. There seems no way of escape. Even so, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.” Or the lot of some Christian reader may be that of the widow to whom God’s prophet was sent—the barrel of meal is almost empty, your circumstances are critical to the last degree, and your heart’s faint within you.

What is such a one to do? Why, turn to the sure promise of God, or, better still, look up to the Promiser Himself. “*Hitherto* hath the LORD helped us” (1Sa 17:12)—then will He fail them now? “*Remember* all the way which the LORD thy God led thee” (Deu 8:2)—let the memory of past mercies and deliverances reassure you now. God is still the same. Is it not written, “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee” (Job 5:19)? True, the afflictions of the righteous are many, yet the very verse which affirms this adds, “but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (Psa 34:19).

Possibly some reader is saying, “But I am growing old and feeble. Soon I shall no longer be able to work. Then what will become of me?” To you also the word is, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.” God has placed on record a special promise for your comfort, “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa 46:4). Then can you not fully trust Him?

Perhaps another is thinking, “It is the prospect of *tomorrow* which renders me so uneasy and fearful. I know that God says ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof’ (Mat 6:34), but I cannot help looking forward and anticipating the pressing emergency ahead of me.” Very well, if you must look forward, look upward, too. *God* is on the throne, and He will not vacate it when the morrow arrives! Is it not written, “My God *shall* supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:19)? That covers the future. Then, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.” A very large part of this consists in calmly and confidently counting upon God *to continue* supplying our every need.

A blessed illustration of wholehearted trust, fully authenticated, came before us in a book which we recently read. Some years ago, in Germany, there was a daughter of God who was very poor in this world’s goods. So poor that she literally lived from hand to mouth, yet uncomplainingly, and with confidence in the Lord. One afternoon, several Christian friends called to see her. They, too, were very poor, and much fatigued from the

journey, and looked in sore need of some refreshment. But in this sister's cupboard was neither bread nor coffee. It was empty. She lifted up her heart unto Him from whom every good and every perfect gift comes, and felt sure that her fervent desire to entertain, not angels, but some of His children, was granted. She filled the kettle with water and put it on the fire, and presently it began to boil. The sister silently thanked the Lord for granting her request, and laid the table, though nothing was in sight. But still the hand of God was withheld, for, "Patience must have her perfect work" (Jam 1:4). Again, she lifted up her heart to God, and said, "Lord, the kettle is boiling!" Just then came a knock at the door, and other friends, who knew nothing of the urgency of her case, appeared with baskets on their arms. Soon the table was filled with good things. God never disappoints real faith in *Him!*

