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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE PRIESTLY OFFICE OF CHRIST

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin” (Heb 5:1). Thus, a priest is a person who officiates in the name of others, approaching unto God to make atonement for them by sacrifice. The design of his ministrations is to render the Object of our worship propitious, to avert His wrath from men, and to procure their restoration to His favour. As Prophet, Christ treats with men, in the name of God, making known to them His counsels and commands. As Priest, He treats with God in the name of men, prevailing upon Him to admit them to His friendship.

That Christ should officiate as Priest was determined upon in the eternal counsels of God. He was “set forth [or “foreordained”] to be a propitiation” (Rom 3:25). That is, to be a propitiatory sacrifice to make satisfaction for the sins of His people, which is one part of Christ’s priestly office, on which redemption by His blood is founded. To which He was “verily foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1Pe 1:18-20). The sufferings and death of Christ were all according to the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Act 2:23), and whatsoever the Jews and Gentiles did to Him was none other than what God’s “hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Act 4:27-28). All that He endured was in the execution of His priestly office, of which the decree of God was the spring.

To this priestly office, Christ was called of God. He did not glorify Himself to be called a Priest, but His Father called Him to take upon Him this office (Heb 5:5), invested Him with it (Pro 8:23), swore Him into it (Psa 110:4), in the counsel and covenant of peace (Zec 6:13), and this, to show the importance, dignity, validity, and perpetuity of His priesthood. To all which Christ agreed, saying, “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not” (Psa 40:6)—I foresee that the blood of beasts offered by sinful men, will not be, in the

issue, acceptable to Thee, nor sufficient to atone for sin—"But a body hast thou prepared me" (Heb 10:5) in purpose, counsel, and covenant, which I am willing, in due time, to assume and offer up a sacrifice unto divine justice—"Lo, I come... to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:7).

Christ is clearly set forth as Priest in the prophecies of the Old Testament. "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house" (1Sa 2:35). He was to be One who was to stand up with "Urim and Thummim" (Neh 7:65). He would be "a priest upon his throne" (Zec 6:13). He would be "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa 110:4). He was to make His soul "an offering for sin" and make "intercession for the transgressors" (Isa 53:10, 12). It is very striking to notice that, in some of His theophanic manifestations during Old Testament times, He appeared in the vestments of a priest "clothed with linen" (Eze 9:2, Dan 10:5).

"Concerning His priesthood, we have briefly to remark, that the end and use of it is, that He may be a Mediator, pure from every stain and by His holiness may render us acceptable to God. But because the righteous curse prevents our access to Him, and God in His character of Judge is offended with us—in order that our Priest may appease the wrath of God, and procure His favour for us, there is a necessity for the intervention of an atonement. Wherefore, that Christ might perform this office, it was necessary for Him to appear with a sacrifice. For even under the Law, the priest was not permitted to enter the sanctuary without blood. That the faithful might know that, notwithstanding the interposition of the priest as an intercessor, yet it was impossible for God to be propitiated without the expiation of sin" (John Calvin's "Institutes," Book 2, chapter 15, 1509-1564).

It is in the epistle to the Hebrews, and there alone in the New Testament, that the theme of Christ's priesthood is unfolded. The reason for this being that, it was to the Jews only God had entrusted the sole representation of it in their typical priesthood. In that epistle, we are shown how Christ fulfilled all that was foreshadowed of Him both by Aaron and by Melchizedek. Unto those desiring to make a fuller study for themselves, we would point out, it is most important to observe that it is not until *after* the apostle had shown how Christ had fulfilled what Aaron foreshadowed (Heb 5:1-4), that He is saluted "an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10). We would also emphasize the fact that our Lord is *not* said to be "an high priest *of* the order of Melchizedek," but "after the order of." The difference between the two expressions is real and radical. The word "of" would have necessarily *limited* His priesthood to a certain order, but that could not be. *His* priesthood is not restricted to any human order nor could any one man fully prefigure, still less perform, all that pertains to Christ's priesthood.

Both the typical persons of Aaron and Melchizedek were required to adumbrate the varied excellencies and activities of our great High Priest. The former sets forth in fullest detail the *nature* of His sacerdotal functions. There is no record in Scripture that Melchizedek offered any sacrifice unto God, officiated in any holy place (the tabernacle not being built till the days of Moses), or that he made intercession for transgressions—all of which are the very things which pertained to Christ's priestly office. But Aaron *did* offer a propitiatory sacrifice unto God (Lev 16), enter into the holy of holies, bore the names of Israel in the breastplate of judgment over his heart, and carried the sweet incense into the

very presence of Jehovah. Supplementing this, Melchizedek presaged the dignity of Christ's person. He was a *royal* priest, and his office independent of human heredity. The "without father, without mother" of Hebrews 7:3, denoting that he owed not his sacerdotal office unto fleshly ancestry, as did the Levitical priests.

Socinians (Unitarians) and others, who are infected with their poison, quote Hebrews 8:4 to prove that Christ only entered upon the discharge of His sacerdotal office after His ascension. "For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law." But this means, first, that had Christ's office been of the *same kind* as the Levitical, which functioned all the days of His flesh, He could not have been a Priest—because the office was vested in a tribe to which He did not belong. And, second, that *if the whole* of His sacerdotal functions were to be executed on earth, He must be excluded from the priestly office—because He had no legal access into the holy of holies in the earthly temple at Jerusalem. *There* His blood could not be presented.

That Christ entered upon His priestly office, and that He exercised its functions, *before* His ascension, is abundantly established by the plainest evidence of Scripture. First, He was made "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God *to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*" (Heb 2:17), and Romans 5:10 affirms that "We were reconciled to God by *the death* of his Son"! Second, "We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens" (Heb 4:14), who "*was* [namely, in the time of His humiliation] tempted," etc. (Heb 4:15). Third, in the days of His flesh, He "*offered up* [language which always denotes a *priestly act*] prayers and supplications" (Heb 5:7). Fourth, "For such a high priest became us...who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice...for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Heb 7:26-28). Fifth, at Calvary, the Lord Jesus was not only the Lamb of God bearing judgment, but He was also His Priest officiating at the altar. "For *every* high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat *also to offer*" (Heb 8:3)—He "*offered himself* without spot to God" (Heb 9:14). Sixth, "But Christ being come an high priest...by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place" (Heb 9:11-12). Finally, if Christ was not a priest before His entrance into heaven, if He did not enter therein on the ground of the sacrifice which He offered to God on the cross, then, all the analogy between the type of Leviticus 16 and the Antitype is utterly destroyed.

"How doth Christ execute the office of Priest? Answer—Christ executeth that office of a priest in His once offering Himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of His people, and in making continual intercession for them" (Westminster Catechism). In this answer, the two great branches of the Mediator's sacerdotal work are briefly described. The second duty of His priestly office was typified by the entrance of Aaron into the holy of holies, where he sprinkled the blood of the atoning sacrifice, and burned incense before the mercy-seat. The antitype of this is Christ's entrance into heaven, "There to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24). As Aaron's entrance into the holiest was *after* the sacrifice had been slain, so it was with our Lord. Concerning the needs-be for and the nature of His intercession, who are the subjects, and what is its design, we have treated of in our articles on "The Intercession of Christ," which began in the November 1930 issue.

Because of the perfect union between His Deity and humanity, Christ is “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:17). To be “merciful” is to be compassionate, ever ready, under the influence of a tender sympathy, to support, comfort, and deliver. Having trod the same path as His suffering and tried people, Christ is able to enter into their afflictions. He is not like an angel, which has never experienced pain. He is Man, nor have His sympathies been impaired by His exaltation to heaven. The same human heart beats within the bosom of Him who sits at God’s right hand, as caused Him to weep over Jerusalem! To be “faithful” means that His compassions are regulated by holiness. His sympathies are exercised according to the requirements of God’s truth. There is a perfect balance between His maintenance of God’s claims and His ministering to our infirmities.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

52. *Apostasy (10:25-27)*

We have now reached one of the most solemn and fear-inspiring passages to be found, not only in this epistle, but in all the Word of God. May the Holy Spirit fit each of our hearts to approach it in that godly trembling which becomes those who have within their own hearts the seeds of apostasy.

Let it be duly considered at the outset that the verses, which are now to be before us, were addressed not to those who made no profession of being genuine Christians, but instead, unto them whom the Spirit of truth owned as “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). Nevertheless, *He* now dehorts them from stepping over the brink of that awful precipice which was before them, and faithfully warns of the certain destruction which would follow did they do so. Instead of replying to this with arguments drawn from the eternal security of God’s saints, let us seek grace to honestly face the terrible danger which menaces each of us while we remain in this world of sin, and to use all necessary means to avoid so fearful and fatal a calamity.

In the past, dear reader, there have been thousands who were just as confident that *they* had been genuinely saved, and were truly trusting in the merits of the finished work of Christ to take them safely through to heaven, as *you* may be. Nevertheless, they are now in the torments of hell. Their confidence was a carnal one. Their “faith,” no better than that which the demons have. Their faith was but a natural one, which rested on the bare letter of Scripture. It was not a supernatural one, wrought in the heart by God. They were too confident that their faith *was* a saving one, to thoroughly, searchingly, frequently, *test* it by the Scriptures, to discover whether or not it was bringing forth those *fruits* which are inseparable from the faith of God’s elect. If they read an article like this, they proudly concluded that it belonged to someone else. So cocksure were they that they were born again so many years ago, they refused to heed the command of 11 Corinthians 13:5, “Prove your own selves.” And now, it is too late! They wasted their day of opportunity, and the “blackness of darkness” (Jud 1:13) is their portion forever.

In view of this solemn and awful fact, the writer earnestly calls upon himself and each reader to get down before God and sincerely cry, "Search me, O God: reveal me to myself. If I am deceived, undeceive me ere it be eternally too late. Enable me to measure myself faithfully by Thy Word, so that I may discover whether or not my heart has been renewed, whether I have abandoned every course of self-will and truly surrendered to Thee. Whether I have so repented that I hate all sin, and fervently long to be free from its power, loathe myself and seek diligently to deny myself. Whether my faith is that which overcomes the world (1Jo 5:4), or whether it be only a mere notional thing which produces no godly living. Whether I am a fruitful branch of the vine, or only a cumberer of the ground. In short, whether I be a *new* creature in Christ, or only a painted hypocrite." If I have an honest heart, then, I am willing, yea, anxious, to face and know the *real* truth about myself.

Perhaps some readers are ready to say, "I already know the truth about myself. I believe what God's Word tells me. I am a sinner, with no good thing dwelling in me. My only hope is in Christ." Yes, dear friend, but Christ *saves* His people *from* their sins. Christ sends His Holy Spirit into their hearts, so that they are radically changed from what they were previously. The Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in the hearts of those He regenerates, and that love is manifested by a deep desire and sincere determination to *please Him* who loves me. When Christ saves a soul, He saves not only from hell, but from the power of sin. He delivers him from the dominion of Satan, and from the love of the world. He delivers him from the fear of man, the lusts of the flesh, the love of self. True, He has not yet *completed* this blessed work. True, the sinful nature is not yet eradicated, but one who is saved has been delivered from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:14). Salvation is a supernatural thing, which changes the heart, renews the will, transforms the life, so that it is evident to all around that a *miracle* of grace has been wrought.

Thus, it is not sufficient for me to ask, "Have I repudiated my own righteousness, have I renounced all my good works to fit me for heaven, am I trusting alone to Christ?" Many will earnestly and sincerely affirm these things, who yet give no evidence that they have passed from death unto life. Then, what more is necessary for me to ascertain whether or not my faith be a truly saving one? This—There are certain things which "*accompany* salvation" (Heb 6:9), things which are inseparable from it. And for *these*, I must look and be sure I have them. A bundle of wood that sends forth neither heat nor smoke has no fire under it. A tree which, in summer, bears neither fruit nor leaves is dead, So, a faith which does not issue in godly living, in an obedient walk, in spiritual fruit, is not the faith of God's elect. O my reader, I beg you to diligently and faithfully examine yourself by the light of God's unerring Word. Claim not to be a child of Abraham, unless you do the *works* of Abraham (Joh 8:39)!

What is apostasy? It is a making shipwreck of the faith (1Ti 1:19). It is the heart's departure from the living God (Heb 3:12). It is a returning to and being overcome by the world, after a previous escape from its pollutions through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2Pe 2:20). There are various steps which precede it. First, there is a *looking back* (Luk 9:62), like Lot's wife, who, though she had outwardly left Sodom, yet her heart was still there. Second, there is a *drawing back* (Heb 10:38). The requirements of Christ are too exacting to any longer appeal to the heart. Third, there is a *turning back* (Joh 6:66). The path of godliness is too narrow to suit the lustings of the flesh. Fourth, there is a

falling back, which is fatal. "That they might go, and fall backward, and be broken" (Isa 28:13).

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25). This verse forms the transition between the subject of Christian perseverance, treated of in Hebrews 10:23-24, and that of apostasy, which is developed in verse 26 and onwards—though it is much more closely related to the latter than to the former. Most of the commentators are astray on this point, through failing to observe the absence of the word, "And," at the beginning of it, and because they perceive not the significance of the word "forsake." In reality, the contents of this verse form a faithful warning against apostasy. First, the Hebrews are cautioned against forsaking public worship. Second, it is pointed out that "some" had already done so. Third, they are bidden to exhort one another with increased diligence.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Before attempting an exposition of these words, let us first relieve them of a false application which some seek to make of them today. Just as of old, Satan made a wrong use of Psalm 91:11-12 in his tempting of the Saviour (Mat 4:6), so he does with the verse before us. Few are aware of how often the devil brings a Scripture before our minds. When a Christian is seeking to be out and out for Christ, the devil will quote to him, "Be not righteous overmuch" (Ecc 7:16). Likewise, when a child of God resolves to obey 11 Timothy 3:5 and Hebrews 13:13, and separates from all who do not *live* godly, the enemy reminds him of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb 10:25). Romanists used the same text in the early days of the Reformation, and charged Luther and his friends with disobeying this divine command. But, God's Word does not contradict itself. It does not tell us in one place, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2Co 6:14), and here, bid the "sheep" to fraternise with "goats." When rightly understood, this verse affords no handle to those who seek to discourage faithfulness to Christ.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." John Owen (1616-1683) rightly pointed out that, "There is a synecdoche [a part put for the whole] in the word 'assembling,' and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was performed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ, as some of them did when exposed to danger." What is here dehorted is the total relinquishment of Christianity. It is not, "Cease not to *attend* the assembly," but, "forsake not," *abandon* not the assembling of yourselves together. It is not the sin of sloth or of schism which is here considered, but that of apostasy. If a professing Christian forsook the Christian churches and became a Mohammedan, he would disobey this verse. But, for one who puts the honour of Christ before everything else, to turn his back upon the so-called churches, where He is now so grievously dishonoured, is *not* a failure to comply with its terms.

The Greek word for, "forsake not," is a *very* strong and emphatic one, being a double compound, and signifies, "to abandon in time of danger." It is the word used by the agonizing Redeemer on the Cross, when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou *forsaken* me?" (Mat 27:46) It was used by Him, again, when He declared, "Thou wilt not *leave* my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Act 2:27).

It is the word employed by Paul in 11 Timothy 4:10, "For Demas hath *forsaken* me, having loved this present world." It is found in only one other place in this epistle, where it is in obvious antithesis from the verse now before us, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor *forsake* thee" (Heb 13:5). Thus, it will appear that a total and final abandonment of the public profession of Christianity is what is here warned against.

One may, therefore, discern how that Hebrews 10:25 supplies a most appropriate link between verses 23-24 and verse 26. Verse 25 prescribes another means to enable the wavering Hebrews to remain constant in the Christian faith. If they were to, "Hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," and if they were to, "Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb 10:24), then, they must not "forsake the assembling" of themselves together. The word for "assembling together" is a double compound, and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 11 Thessalonians 2:1, "Our gathering together unto him," that is, unto Christ. This also shows that the "assembling together" here is under one Head, and that the "forsaking" is because *He* has been turned away from.

To enforce the above caution, the apostle adds, "as the manner of some is." The Greek word for, "manner," signifies, "custom," and is so translated in Luke 2:42. This supplies additional confirmation that the evil, against which the Hebrews were dehorted, was no mere occasionally absenting themselves from the Christian churches, but a deliberate, fixed, and final departure from them. In John 6:66, we read that, "From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." John also wrote of those who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (1Jo 2:19). Whilst at the close of his labours, Paul had to say, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2Ti 1:15). So here, some who had made a profession of the Christian faith had now abandoned the same and gone back to Judaism. It was to warn the others, against this fatal step, that the apostle now wrote as he did. Compare 1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 11:20.

"But exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25). Here is the positive side of our verse. This is another of the means appointed by God to confirm Christians in their holy confession. To "exhort one another" is a duty to which all Christians are called. Alas, how rarely is it performed these evil days. Yet, from the human side, such failure is hardly to be wondered at. The vast majority of professing Christians wish to be petted and flattered, rather than exhorted and cautioned. Most of them are so hypersensitive that the slightest criticism offends them. One who seeks grace to be faithful and to act in *true* "love" to those whom he supposes are his brethren and sisters in Christ, has a thankless task before him, so far as man is concerned—he will soon lose nearly all his "friends" (?), and sever the "fellowship" (?) which exists between him and them. But this will only give him a little taste of "the fellowship of *His* sufferings" (Phi 3:10). Hebrews 3:13 is still God's command!

"And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25). There seems little room for doubt that the first reference here is to the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, which was now very nigh, for this epistle was written within less than eight years before Jerusalem was captured by Titus. That terrible catastrophe had been foretold, again and again, by Israel's prophets, and was plainly announced by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21. The approach of that dreadful "day" could be plainly *seen* or perceived

by those possessing spiritual discernment. The continued refusal of the Nation to repent of their murder of Christ, and the abandoning of Christianity for an apostate Judaism by such large numbers, clearly presaged the bursting of the storm of God's judgment. This very fact supplied an additional motive for genuine Christians to remain faithful. The Lord Jesus promised that His followers should be preserved from the destruction of Jerusalem, but *only* as they attended to His cautions in Luke 21:8, 19, 34, etc., only as they persevered in faith and holiness, Matthew 24:13. The particular motive unto diligence, here set before the Hebrews, is applicable to other Christians just to the extent that they find themselves in similar circumstances.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:26). The general truth here set forth is that, should those who have been converted and become Christians apostatize from Christ, their state would be hopeless. This is presented under the following details. First, because of the nature of this sin, namely, a deliberate and final abandonment of the Christian faith. Second, the ones warned against the committal of it. Third, the terrible aggravation of it did such commit it. Fourth, the unpardonableness of it.

"For if we sin willfully" (Heb 10:26). The causal particle whereby this verse is premised has at least a threefold force. First and more immediately, it points the plain and inevitable conclusion from what has just been said in Hebrews 10:25. They who "forsake" and abandon the Christian assemblies, with all that they stand for, commit a sin for which the sacrifice of Christ avails not. Should it be said that Scripture declares, "The blood of Christ cleanseth from *all* sin," the reply is that it only says, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth *us* from all sin," and none of those spoken of throughout that verse (1Jo 1:7) ever commit *this* sin! Moreover, that very same epistle plainly teaches there is a sin for which the blood of Christ does not avail. See 1 John 5:16. Second, and more generally, a reason is here adduced as to why Christians need to heed the exhortations given in Hebrews 10:22-25—the duties therein prescribed are the means which God has appointed for preserving His people against this unpardonable crime. Third and more remotely, a solemn warning is here given against a wrong use being made of the precious promise recorded in Hebrews 10:17—that blessed declaration is not designed to encourage a course of carelessness and recklessness.

"For if we sin willfully" (Heb 10:26). "The word *sin* here is plainly used in a somewhat peculiar sense. It is descriptive not of sin generally, but of a particular kind of sin—apostasy from the faith and profession of the truth, once known and professed. 'The angels that sinned' are the apostate angels. The apostasy described is not so much an act of apostasy as a state of apostasy. It is not, 'If we have sinned, if we have apostatized,' but, 'If we *sin*, if we apostatize, if we continue in apostasy'" (John Brown, 1722-1787). English translators prior to the Authorized Version read, "if we sin *willingly*," the change being made in 1611 to *avoid* giving countenance to the supposition that there is no recovery after *any* voluntary sin. The Greek word will not permit this change. The only other occurrence of it, in 1 Peter 5:2, clearly gives its scope, "Taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly."

"For if we sin willingly," that is, voluntarily, of our own accord, where no constraint is used. The reference is to a definite decision, where an individual deliberately determines to

abandon Christ and turn away from God. "In the Jewish law, as in indeed the case everywhere, a distinction is made between sins of oversight, inadvertence, or ignorance (Lev 4:2, 13, 22; 5:15; Num 15:24, 27-29; compare Act 3:17; 17:30), and sins of presumption, sins that are deliberately and intentionally committed (see Exo 21:14; Num 15:30; Deu 17:12; Psa 19:13). The apostle here has reference, evidently, to such a distinction, and means to speak of a decided and deliberate purpose to break away from the restraints and obligations of the Christian religion" (Albert Barnes, 1798-1870).

"For if we sin willingly," etc. Who are the ones that are here warned against this terrible sin? Who are they that are in danger of committing it? The answer is—*all* who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. But are genuine Christians in any such danger? Looked at from the standpoint of God's everlasting covenant, which He made with them in the person of their Sponsor, which covenant is, "Ordered in all things, and sure" (2Sa 23:5)—No. But considered as they are in themselves, mutable creatures (as was *unfallen* Adam), without any strength of their own—Yes. Viewed as those who still have the sinful nature within them—Yes. Contemplated as those who are yet the objects of Satan's relentless attacks—Yes. But it may be said, "God sees His people *only* in Christ." Not so, is the reply. Were that the case, He would never chasten (Heb 12:5-10) us! God views the Christian both in Christ legally *and* in this world actually. He addresses us as responsible beings (2Pe 1:10) and regulates the manifestations of His love for us according to our conduct (Joh 14:23).

It is to be carefully noted that the apostle Paul did not say, "If *ye* sin willingly," but, "If *we*," thus including himself. Two reasons may be suggested for this. First, to soften a little the severity of this terrible warning. He shows there is no respect of persons in this matter. Were he to commit this dreadful sin himself, he, too, would suffer the same unmitigable doom. Hereby, he sets all preachers and teachers a godly example. Such was his general custom. Compare the "we" in Hebrews 2:3; 3:6, 14; 12:25, and the "us" in 4:1, 11! Second, to emphasize the unvarying outworking of this law. No exceptions are made. The apostle includes himself to show that even he himself could not look to escape the divine vengeance here denounced, if he fell into the sin here described.

"After that we have received the knowledge of the truth" (Heb 10:26). These words not only serve to identify the ones who are cautioned against apostasy, but are added to emphasize the enormity of the sin. It would not be through ignorance or lack of knowledge, but after being enlightened, they abandoned Christianity. The "Truth" rather than the "Gospel" is here specifically mentioned, so as to heighten the contrast—it is for a *lie* that Christ is rejected. The word "knowledge" here is a compound and signifies "acknowledgment," and is so rendered in Titus 1:1, Philemon 1:6. Owen says, "The word is not used anywhere to express the mere conceptions or notions of the mind about this, but such acknowledgment of it as arises from some sense of its power and excellency." To "receive" this acknowledgment of the truth includes an act of the mind in understanding it, an act of the will in consenting, and an act of the heart in embracing it.

"Wherefore the sin, here intended, is plainly a relinquishment and renunciation of the truth of the Gospel, and the promises thereof, with all duty thereunto belonging, after we have been convinced of its truth, and avowed its power and excellency. There is no more required but that this be 'willingly'—not upon a sudden surprisal and temptation, as Peter

denied Christ—not on those compulsions and fears which may work a present dissimulation, without an internal rejection of the Gospel—not through darkness, ignorance making an impression for a season on the minds and reasonings of men, which things, though exceedingly evil and dangerous, may befall them who yet contract not the guilt of this crime. But, it is required thereunto, that men who thus sin, do it by choice, and of their own accord, from the internal [de]pravity of their own mind, and an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God—that they do it by, and with the preference of another way of religion, and a resting therein before or above the Gospel” (John Owen).

The unpardonableness of this sin is affirmed in the words, “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:26). A similar passage, which throws light on our present verse, is found in 1 Samuel 3:14, “And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever.” As there were certain sins which in Old Testament times, from their heinousness and the high-handed rebellion of their perpetrators, had no sacrifice allowed them, but “died without mercy” (Heb 10:28), so it is now with those who apostatize from Christ. There is no relief appointed for them. No means for the expiation of their sin. They voluntarily and finally reject the Gospel, forfeit all interest in the sacrifice of Christ.

Ere leaving this verse, let it be said emphatically that there is nothing in it which in anywise conflicts with the blessed truth of the eternal security of God’s *saints*. The apostle did not here say the Hebrews had apostatized, nor did he affirm they *would* do so. No, instead, he faithfully points out the sure, dreadful, and eternal consequences *did* they do so. “For IF we sin willingly.” It was to keep them from it that he here sets it down by way of supposition, just as in Romans 8:13, he says, “For *if* ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” As to how far a person may go in the taking up of Christianity, and as to what the Spirit may work in him *short of* actual regeneration, and, then, that one apostatize, only God knows. And, as to how close a real Christian may come to *presumptuous* (Psa 19:13) sinning, and yet remain innocent of “the great transgression,” only God can decide. We are only in the place of safety while we maintain the attitude of complete dependency upon the Lord and of unreserved subjection to Him. To indulge the flesh is *dangerous*. To persist in a course of self-gratification is *highly* dangerous, and to remain therein unto the end, would be *fatal*.

“But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). The positive punishment of apostates is here announced. “When a man under that law had contracted the guilt of any such sin, as was indispensably capital in its punishment, for the legal expiation thereof, no sacrifice was appointed or allowed, such as murder, adultery, blasphemy. He had nothing remaining but a fearful expectation of the execution of the sentence of the law against him. And, it is evident that, in this context, the apostle argues from the less unto the greater. If it was so that this was the case of him who so sinned against Moses’ law, how much more must it be so with them that sin against the Gospel, whose sin is incomparably greater, and the punishment more severe?” (John Owen).

The divine punishment which shall be visited upon apostates is first spoken of under the general term “judgment,” as in Hebrews 9:27. This signifies that it will be a righteous sentence proportioned unto their awful crime. There will be a full and open trial, with an impartial judicial condemnation of them. The term is also used to express the punishment

itself (Jam 2:13; 2Pe 2:3). Both meanings are probably included here. There is no mean between pardon and damnation. The sure approach of this judgment is referred to as “a certain fearful looking-for of” it. The word, “certain,” here signifies something which is not fully defined, as in “a certain woman” (Mar 5:25), “a certain nobleman” (Joh 4:46). It, therefore, denotes the “judgment” is inexpressible, such as no human heart can conceive or tongue portray. “Fearful,” intimates the punishment will be so dreadful that, when men come to apprehend it, they are filled with horror and dismay. “Looking-for,” shows that the apostates already have an earnest of God’s wrath in their consciences, even now.

“And fiery indignation,” or “fierceness of fire,” as in the American Revised Version, or more literally, “of fire fervor” (Bagster’s Interlinear). This describes more closely the *nature* of the “judgment” awaiting them. The terms used denote the resistless, tormenting, destroying efficacy of God’s terrible wrath, and emphasizes its dreadful fierceness. God is highly incensed against the apostates, and inconceivably and indescribably dreadful will be His dealings with them. It will express and answer to His *infinite* justice, holiness, and power. “For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isa 66:15). No doubt the reference in our verse is to the final judgment at the last day, and the eternal destruction of God’s enemies. A solemn and graphic shadowing forth of this was given by God when His sword and fiery judgment fell upon the Jews in A.D. 70, destroying their church-state by fire and sword.

“Which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). There is probably an allusion here to the dreadful fate which overtook Nadab and Abihu, concerning whom it is written, “And there went out fire from the LORD, and *devoured* them” (Lev 10:2). And also the judgment visited upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, when, “The ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up,” so that they went down “alive into the pit” (Num 16:30-33). The “adversaries” are those who are actuated by a principle of hostile opposition to Christ and Christianity. They are enemies of God, and God will show Himself to be their Enemy. God’s wrath shall “devour them as to all happiness, all blessedness, all hopes, comfort, and relief at once, but it shall not consume their being. This is that which this fire shall ever prey upon them, and never utterly consume them” (John Owen). From such a doom, may divine grace deliver both writer and reader.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

4. *His Slaying of Goliath*

When Samuel denounced Saul’s first great sin and announced that his kingdom should not continue, he declared, “The LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart” (1Sa 13:14). To this, allusion was made by the apostle Paul in his address in the synagogue at Antioch, “He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony,

and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will" (Act 13:22). A truly wondrous tribute was this unto the character of David, yet one which the general course of his life bore out. The dominant characteristic of our patriarch was his unfeigned and unsurpassed devotion to God, His cause, and His Word. Blessedly is this illustrated in what is now to be before us. The man after God's own heart is the one who is out and out for Him, putting His honour and glory before all other considerations.

1 Samuel 17:15 supplies a precious link between what was considered in our last lesson and what we are now about to ponder. There, we are told, "But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." Knowing that he was to be the next king over Israel, natural prudence would suggest that his best policy was to remain at court, making the most of his opportunities, and seeking to gain the goodwill of the ministers of state. But, instead of so doing, the son of Jesse returned to the sheepfold, leaving it with God to work out His will concerning him. No seeker after self-aggrandisement was David. The palace, as such, possessed no attractions for him. Having fulfilled his service unto the king, he now returns to his father's farm.

"Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh" (1Sa 17:1). Josephus (Antiq. 50:6, c.9, sect. 1) says that this occurred not long after the things related in the preceding chapter had transpired. It seems likely that the Philistines had heard of Samuel's forsaking of Saul, and of the king's melancholy and distraction occasioned by the evil spirit, and deemed it a suitable time to avenge themselves upon Israel for their last slaughter of them (1Sa 14). The enemies of God's people are ever alert to take advantage of their opportunities, and never have they a better one than when their leaders provoke God's Spirit and His prophets leave them. Nevertheless, it is blessed to see here how that God makes the "wrath of man" to praise Him (Psa 76:10).

"And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines" (1Sa 17:2). The king had been relieved, for a season at least, of the evil spirit. But the Spirit of the Lord had not returned to him, as the sequel plainly evidences. A sorry figure did Saul and his forces now cut. "And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath...And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1Sa 17:4, 8-11). Ere pondering the haughty challenge which was here thrown down, let us point out (for the strengthening of faith in the inerrancy of Holy Writ) a small detail which exhibits the minute accuracy and harmony of the Word.

In Numbers 13, we read that the spies sent out by Moses to inspect the promised land, declared, "The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And

there we saw the *giants*, the sons of *Anak*, which come of the giants” (Num 13:32-33). Now, link up with this, Joshua 11:21-22, “And at that time came Joshua, and cut off *the Anakims* from the mountains...there was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in *Gath*, and in Ashdod, there *remained*.” Here, in our present passage, it is stated, quite incidentally, that Goliath belonged to “Gath”! Thus, in the mouth of three witnesses—Moses, Joshua, and Samuel—is the word established, concurring as they do in a manner quite artless, to verify a single particular. How jealous was God about His Word! What a sure foundation faith has to rest upon!

Goliath pictures to us the great enemy of God and man, the devil, seeking to terrify and bring into captivity those who bear the name of the Lord. His prodigious size (probably over eleven feet) symbolized the great power of Satan. His accoutrements (compare the word “armour” in Luke 11:22!) figured the fact that the resources of flesh and blood cannot overcome Satan. His blatant challenge adumbrated the roaring of the lion, our great adversary, as he goes about “seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe 5:8). His declaration that the Israelites were but “servants to Saul” (1Sa 17:8) was only too true, for they were no longer in subjection to the Lord (1Sa 8:7). The dismay of Saul (1Sa 17:11) is in solemn contrast from his boldness in 1 Samuel 11:5-11 and 14:47, when the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. The terror of the people (1Sa 17:11) was a sad evidence of the fact that the “fear of the LORD” (1Sa 11:7) was no longer upon them. But all of this only served to provide a background from which the courage of the man after God’s own heart might the more evidently appear.

The terrible giant of Gath continued to menace the army of Israel twice a day for no less than forty days—a period which, in Scripture, is ever associated with probation and testing. Such a protracted season served to make the more manifest the impotency of a people out of communion with God. There was Saul himself, who “from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people” (1Sa 9:2). There was Jonathan who, assisted only by his armour-bearer, had, on a former occasion, slain twenty of the Philistines (1Sa 14:14). There was Abner, the captain of the host (1Sa 14:50), a “valiant man” (1Sa 26:15), but he too declined Goliath’s challenge. Ah, my reader, the best, the bravest of men, are no more than what God makes them. When He renews not his courage, the stoutest heart is a coward. Yet, God does not act arbitrarily, rather is cowardice one of the consequences of lost communion with Him, “The righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1).

Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. But He does not always, nor generally, act immediately, when we are brought low. No, He “*waits* to be gracious” (Isa 30:18), and that, that our helplessness may be the more fully realized, that His delivering hand may be seen the more clearly, and that His merciful interposition may be the more appreciated. But even at this time, when all seemed lost to Israel, when there was none in her army that dared to pick up the gauntlet which Goliath had thrown down, God had His man in reserve, and in due time, he appeared on the scene and vindicated the glorious name of JEHOVAH. The instrument chosen seemed, to natural wisdom and military prudence, a weak and foolish one, utterly unfitted for the work before him. Ah, it is just such that God uses, and why? That the honour may be His, that “No flesh should glory in his presence” (1Co 1:29). Before considering the grand victory which the Lord wrought through David, let us

carefully ponder the training which he had received in the school of God. This is deeply important for our hearts.

It was away from the crowds, in the quietude of pastoral life, that David was taught the wondrous resources which there are in God available to faith. There, in the fields of Bethlehem, he had, by divine enablement, slain the lion and the bear (1Sa 17:34-35). This is ever God's way. He teaches in secret that soul which He has elected shall serve Him in public. Ah, my reader, is it not just at this point that we may discover the explanation of our failures? It is because we have not sufficiently cultivated the "secret place of the most High" (Psa 91:1). *That* is our primary need. But do we really esteem communion with God our highest privilege? Do we realize that walking with God is the source of our strength?

There had been direct dealings between David's soul and God out there in the solitude of the fields, and it is only thus that any of us are taught how to get the victory. Have you yet learned, my brother or sister, that the closet is the great battlefield of faith! It is the genuine denying of self, the daily taking up of the cross, the knowing how to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and the bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2Co 10:5). Let the foe be met and conquered in private, and we shall not have to mourn defeat when we meet him in public. O may the Holy Spirit impress deeply upon each of our hearts the vital importance of coming forth from the presence of God as we enter upon any service unto Him. *This* it is which regulates the difference between success and failure. Note how the blessed Redeemer acted on this principle—Luke 6:12-13, etc.!

"And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the Captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge" (1Sa 17:17-18). Another beautiful type is this of our Saviour going about His Father's business, seeking the good of His *brethren*. A similar one is found in Genesis 37:13-14. But without staying to develop this thought, let us observe how God was directing all things to the accomplishment of His purpose. Jesse had eight sons (1Sa 16:10-11), and only three of them had joined Saul's army (1Sa 17:13), so that five of them were at home. Yet, David, the youngest, was the one sent—though Jesse knew it not, God had work for *him* to do. Nothing happens by chance in this world. *All* is controlled and directed from on High (Joh 19:11).

"And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle" (1Sa 17:20). How this evidenced the readiness and eagerness of David to obey his father's orders! Again, we may look from the type to the Antitype, and hear Him say, "Lo, I come...to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:7). Blessed is it to mark that David was as mindful of his father's sheep as he was of his commands. His leaving them "with a keeper," evidenced his care and fidelity in the discharge of his office. His faithfulness in a few things fitted him to be ruler over many things. He, who is best qualified to command, is the one who had, previously, learned to obey.

"God's providence brought him to the camp very seasonably, when both sides had set the battle in array, and as it should seem were more likely to come to an engagement than they had yet been all the forty days (1Sa 17:21). Both sides were now preparing to fight.

Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army just in that critical juncture, but the wise God orders the time, and all the circumstances, of actions and affairs, so as to serve His design of securing the interests of Israel, and advancing the man after His own heart" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

Though he had only just completed a long journey, we are told that David "ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren" (1Sa 17:22). This reminds of Proverbs 22:29, "Seest thou a man diligent in business? he shall stand before kings." As David talked with his brethren, Goliath came forth again and repeated his challenge. The whole army was "sore afraid" (1Sa 17:24), and though reminding one another of the promised reward awaiting the one who slew the giant, none dared to venture his life—such inducements as Saul offered, sink into utter insignificance when *death* confronts a man. David mildly expostulated with those who stood near him, pointing out that Goliath was defying "the armies of the living God" (1Sa 17:26).

"And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightiest see the battle" (1Sa 17:28). How this reminds us of what is said of David's Son and Lord in John 1:11, etc. There is a lesson here which every true minister of Christ does well to take to heart, for by so doing he will be forearmed against many a disappointment and discouragement. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master! If the incarnate Son was not appreciated, his agents should not expect to be. "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10). Not only will men, in general, be displeased, but even the people of God, when in a low state, will neither understand nor value the actings of *faith*. The man of God must be prepared to be misinterpreted and to stand alone.

Blessed is it to mark David's reply to the cruel taunt of his brother. It was a real testing of his meekness, but when he was reviled, he reviled not again. Nor did he attempt any self-vindication, or explanation of his conduct—such had been quite wasted upon one with such a spirit. First, he simply asked, "What have I done?" What fault have I committed to be thus chided? Reminding us of our Lord's meek reply under a much stronger provocation, "Why smitest thou me?" (Joh 18:23). Second, he said, "Is there not a cause?" (1Sa 17:29). This, he left with him. *There* was a cause for his coming to the camp. His father had sent him. The honour of Israel—sullied by Goliath—required it. The glory of God necessitated it. Third, he "turned from him toward another" (1Sa 17:30).

David's speaking to one and another soon reached the ears of Saul, who accordingly sent for him (1Sa 17:31). To the king, he at once said, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1Sa 17:32). Only to be met with this reply, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him" (1Sa 17:33). Ah, "Those that undertake great and public services must not think it strange if they be discountenanced and opposed by those from whom they have reason to expect support and assistance. But must humbly go on with their work, in the face, not only of their enemies' threats, but of their friends' sleights and suspicions" (Matthew Henry). The language used by him in the presence of the king was not the bravado of a boaster, but the God-honouring testimony of a man of faith. Saul and his people were in despair as the consequence of their

being occupied with the things of sight. The man of faith had a contemptuous disdain for Goliath because he viewed him from God's viewpoint—as His enemy, as “uncircumcised.” Note how he attributed his previous successes to the Lord, and how he improved them to count upon Him for further victory. See 1Samuel 17:37.

The response made by Saul unto David's pleading was solemnly ludicrous. First, he said, “Go, and the Lord be with thee” (1Sa 17:37), which were idle words on such lips. Next, we read that “Saul armed David with his own armour” (1Sa 17:38) (i.e., with some that he kept in his armoury), in which he had far more confidence than in God. But David quickly perceived that such was unsuited to him. The one, who has much to do with God in secret, cannot employ worldly means and methods in public. The man of faith has no use for carnal weapons. Such things as ecclesiastical titles, dress, ritualistic ceremonies, which are imposing to the eye of the natural man, are but bubbles and baubles to the spiritual. “And David put them off him” (1Sa 17:39), and advanced to meet the haughty Philistine with only a sling and five smooth stones. Should it be asked, “But are we not justified using *means*?” The answer is, Yes, the means which *God* supplies (the “smooth stones”), but not that which man offers—“his armour.”

“When the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him” (1Sa 17:42). First, Eliab had taunted, then Saul had sought to discourage, and now, Goliath scorns him. Ah, the one who (by grace) is walking by faith must not expect to be popular with men, for they have no capacity to appreciate that which actuates him. But true faith is neither chilled by a cold reception nor cooled by outward difficulties. It looks away from both, unto Him with whom it has to do. If God be “for us” (Rom 8:31), it matters not who be against us. Nevertheless, faith has to be *tested*—to prove its genuineness, to strengthen its fiber, to give occasion for its exercise. Well may writer and reader pray, “Lord, increase our faith.”

The Philistine blustered, “cursed David by his gods” (1Sa 17:43), and vowed he would give his flesh unto the fowls and beasts. But it is written, “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong” (Ecc 9:11). And again, “God resisteth the proud” (Jam 4:6). The response made by David at once revealed the secret of his confidence, the source of his strength, and the certainty of his victory, “I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (1Sa 17:45). Ah, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Pro 18:10).

The reader is so familiar with the blessed sequel that little comment on it is required. Faith, having brought God into the scene, could announce the victory in advance (1Sa 17:46). One stone in its hand was worth more than all the Philistine's armour on the giant of unbelief. And why? Because that stone, though flung by David's sling, was directed and made efficacious by the hand of God. It is pitiable to find how some of the best commentators missed the real point here. Verse 5 begins the description of Goliath's armour by saying, “He had a helmet of brass upon his head” (1Sa 17:5). Some have suggested this fell off when he lifted up his hand to curse David by his gods (1Sa 17:43). Others supposed he left the visor open that he might see the better. But David's stone did not enter his eye, but his “forehead”—Divine power sent it through the helmet of brass! In David's cutting off his head (1Sa 17:51), we have a foreshadowment of what is recorded in Hebrews 2:14.

SAVING FAITH

2. *Its Nature*

“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Pro 30:12). A great many suppose that such a verse as this applies only to those who are trusting in something other than Christ for their acceptance before God, such as people who are relying upon baptism, church membership, or their own moral and religious performances. But it is a great mistake to limit such Scriptures unto the class just mentioned. Such a verse as, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro 14:12), has a far wider application than to merely those who are resting on something of or from themselves to secure a title to everlasting bliss. Equally wrong is it to imagine that the only *deceived* souls there are, are they who have no faith in Christ.

There is in Christendom today a very large number of people who have been taught that nothing the sinner can do will ever merit the esteem of God. They have been informed, and rightly so, that the highest moral achievements of the natural man are only “filthy rags” (Isa 64:6) in the sight of the thrice holy God. They have heard quoted so often such passages as, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Ti 3:5), that they have become thoroughly convinced that heaven cannot be attained by any doings of the creature. Further, they have been told so often that *Christ alone* can save any sinner, this has become a settled article in their creed, from which neither man nor devil can shake them. So far so good.

That large company, to which we are now referring, have also been taught that, while Christ is the only Way unto the Father, yet He becomes so only as faith is personally exercised in and upon Him. That He only becomes our Saviour when we believe on Him. During the last twenty-five years, almost the whole emphasis of “Gospel preaching” has been thrown upon faith in Christ, and evangelistic efforts have been almost entirely confined to getting people to “believe” on the Lord Jesus. Apparently, there has been great success. Thousands upon thousands have responded—have, as they suppose, accepted Christ as their own personal Saviour. Yet, we wish to point out here that it is as serious an error to suppose that all who “believe in Christ” are saved, as it is to conclude that only those are deceived (and are described in Proverbs 14:12 and 30:12) who have no faith in Christ.

No one can read the New Testament attentively without discovering that there is a “believing” in Christ *which does not save*. In John 8:30, we are told, “As he spake these words, many *believed* on him.” Mark carefully, it is not merely said, “many believe *in* him,” but, “many believed *on* him.” Nevertheless, one does not have to read much farther on in the chapter to discover that those very people were unregenerate and unsaved souls. In John 8:44, we find the Lord telling these very “believers” that *they* were of their father the devil, and in John 8:59, we find them taking up stones to cast at Him. This has

presented a real difficulty unto some. Yet it ought not. They created their own difficulty, by supposing that faith in Christ necessarily saves. It does not. There *is* a faith in Christ which saves, and there is also a faith in Christ which *does not* save.

“Among the chief rulers also many *believed* on him.” Were, then, those men saved? Many preachers and evangelists, as well as tens of thousands of their blinded dupes, would answer, “Most assuredly!” But, let us note what immediately follows here, “But because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (Joh 12:42-43). Will any of our readers now say that those men were *saved*? If so, it is clear proof that you are utter strangers to any saving work of God in your own souls. Men who are afraid to hazard the loss of their worldly positions, temporal interests, personal reputations, or anything else that is dear to them, for Christ’s sake, are yet in their sins—no matter how they may be trusting in Christ’s finished work to take them to heaven.

Probably most of our readers have been brought up under the teaching that there are only two classes of people in this world, believers and unbelievers. But such a classification is most misleading and is utterly erroneous. God’s Word divides earth’s inhabitants into *three* classes, “Give none offence, neither to [1] the Jews, nor [2] to the Gentiles, nor [3] to the church of God” (1Co 10:32). It was so during the Old Testament times, more noticeably so from the days of Moses onwards. There was, first, the “Gentile” or heathen nations, outside the commonwealth of Israel, which formed by far the largest class. Corresponding with that class, today, are the countless millions of modern heathen, who are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2Ti 3:4). Second, there was the nation of Israel, which has to be subdivided into two groups, for as Romans 9:6 declares, “They are *not* all Israel, which are of Israel.” By far, the larger portion of the nation of Israel were only the nominal people of God, in outward relation to Him. Corresponding with this class is the great mass of empty professors bearing the name of Christ. Third, there was the spiritual remnant of Israel, whose calling, hope, and inheritance was heavenly. Corresponding to them, in this day, are the genuine Christians, God’s “*little flock*” (Luk 12:32).

The same threefold division among men is plainly discernible throughout John’s Gospel. First, there was the hardened leaders of the nation, the scribes and Pharisees, priests and elders. From start to finish, they were openly opposed to Christ, and neither His blessed teaching nor wondrous works had any melting effects upon them. Second, there was the common people, who “heard him gladly” (Mar 12:37), a great many of whom are said to have “believed on him” (see Joh 2:23; 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 12:44; 12:11), but, concerning whom, there is nothing to show that they were saved. They were not outwardly opposed to Christ, but they never yielded their hearts to Him. They were impressed by His divine credentials, yet, were easily offended (Joh 6:66). Third, there was the insignificant handful who “received him” (Joh 1:12) into their hearts and lives—received Him as their Lord and Saviour.

The same three classes are clearly discernible (to the anointed eyes) in the world today. First, there are the vast multitudes who make no profession at all, who see nothing in Christ that they should desire Him—people who are deaf to every appeal, and who make little attempt to conceal their hatred of the Lord Jesus. Second, there is that large company

who are attracted by Christ in a natural way. So far from being openly antagonistic to Him and His cause, they are found among His followers. Having been taught much of the truth, they “believe in Christ,” just as children reared by conscientious Mohammedans believe firmly and devoutly in Mohammed. Having received much instruction concerning the virtues of Christ’s precious blood, they trust in its merits to deliver them from the wrath to come. And yet, there is nothing in their daily lives to show that they are *new* creatures in Christ Jesus! Third, there is the “few” (Mat 7:13-14) who deny themselves, take up the cross daily, and follow a despised and rejected Christ in the path of loving and unreserved obedience unto God.

Yes, there is a faith in Christ which saves, but there is a faith in Christ which does not save. From this statement, probably few will dissent, yet many will be inclined to weaken it by saying that faith in Christ which does not save is merely an historical faith, or, where there is a believing *about* Christ, instead of a believing *in* Him. Not so. That there are those who mistake an historical faith about Christ, for a saving faith in Christ, we do not deny. But what we would here emphasize is the solemn fact that there are *also* some who have *more* than an historical faith, more than a mere head-knowledge about Him, who yet have a faith which comes short of being a quickening and saving one. Not only are there some with this non-saving faith, but today, there are vast numbers of such all around us. There are a people who furnish the antitypes of those which we called attention to in the last article—who were represented and illustrated in Old Testament times by those who believed in, rested on, leaned upon, relied upon the Lord, but who were, nevertheless, unsaved souls.

What, then, does saving faith consist of? In seeking to answer this question, our present object is not only to supply a Scriptural definition, but one which, at the same time, differentiates it from a non-saving faith. Nor is this any easy task, for the two things often have much in common. That faith in Christ which does not save has in it more than one element or ingredient of that faith which *does* vitally unite the soul to Him. Those pitfalls, which the writer must now seek to avoid, are the unduly discouraging of real saints on the one hand, by raising the standard higher than Scripture has raised it, and encouraging unregenerate professors, on the other hand, by so lowering the standard as to include them. We do not wish to withhold from the people of God their legitimate portion, nor do we want to commit the sin of taking the children’s bread and casting it to the dogs. May the Holy Spirit Himself deign to guide us into the truth.

Much error had been avoided on this subject if due care was taken to frame a Scriptural definition of *unbelief*. Again and again, in Scripture, we find believing and not believing placed in antithesis, and we are afforded much help toward the arriving at a correct conception of the real nature of saving faith, when we obtain a right understanding of the character of unbelief. It will, at once, be discovered that saving faith is far more than a hearty assenting unto what God’s Word sets before us, when we perceive that unbelief is much more than an error of judgment or a failure to assent unto the truth. Scripture depicts unbelief as a virulent and violent *principle of opposition* to God. Unbelief has both a passive and active, a negative and positive side, and therefore, the Greek noun is rendered both by “unbelief” (Rom 11:20; Heb 4:6, 11), and “disobedience” (Eph 2:2; 5:6), and the

verb by “believed not” (Heb 3:18; 11:31) and “obey not” (1Pe 3:1; 4:17). A few concrete examples will make this plainer.

Take, first, the case of Adam. There was something more than a mere negative failing to believe God’s solemn threat that, in the day he should eat of the forbidden fruit, he would surely die, “By one man’s *disobedience* many were made sinners” (Rom 5:19). Nor did the heinousness of our first parents’ sin consist in listening to the lie of the serpent, for 1 Timothy 2:14 expressly declares, “Adam *was not* deceived.” No, he was determined to have his own way, no matter what God had prohibited and threatened. Thus, the very first case of unbelief in human history consisted, not only in negatively failing to take to heart what God had so clearly and so solemnly said, but also in a deliberate defiance of and rebellion against Him.

Take the case of Israel in the wilderness. Concerning them, it is said, “They could not enter in [the promised land] because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Now, exactly what do those words signify? Do they mean that Canaan was missed by them because of their failure to appropriate the promise of God? Yes, for a “promise” of entering in was “left” them, but it was not “mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb 4:1-2). God had declared that the seed of Abraham should inherit that land which flowed with milk and honey, and it was the privilege of that generation, which was delivered from Egypt, to lay hold of and apply that promise to themselves. But, they did not. Yet that is not all! There was something far worse. There was another element in their unbelief which is usually lost sight of now-a-days—they were openly disobedient against God. When the spies brought back a sample of the goodly grapes, and Joshua urged them to go up and possess the land, they would not. Accordingly Moses declared, “Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God” (Deu 1:26). Ah, *there* is the positive side of their unbelief. They were self-willed, disobedient, defiant.

Consider now the case of that generation of Israel which was in Palestine when the Lord Jesus appeared among them as “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God” (Rom 15:8). John 1:11 informs us, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not,” which, as the next verse defines, “They believed” Him not. But is that all? Were they guilty of nothing more than a failure to assent to His teaching and trust in His person? Nay, verily, that was merely the negative side of their unbelief. Positively, they “hated” Him (Joh 15:25), and “will not come to” Him (Joh 5:40). His holy demands suited not their fleshly desires, and, therefore, they said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). Thus, their unbelief too, consisted in the spirit of self-will and open defiance, a determination to please themselves at all costs.

Unbelief is not simply an infirmity of fallen human nature, but is a heinous crime. Scripture, everywhere, attributes it to love of sin, obstinacy of will, hardness of heart. Unbelief has its root in a depraved nature, in a mind which is enmity against God. Love of sin is the immediate cause of unbelief, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:19). “The light of the Gospel is brought unto a place or people. They come so near it as to discover its end or tendency, but as soon as they find that it aims to part them and their sins, they will have no more to do with it. They like not the terms of the Gospel, and

so perish in and for their iniquities” (John Owen). If the *Gospel* were more clearly and faithfully preached, fewer would profess to believe it!

Saving faith, then, is the opposite of damning unbelief. Both issue from the heart—unbelief, from a heart that is alienated from God, which is in a state of rebellion against Him—saving faith, from a heart which is reconciled to Him and so has ceased to fight against Him. Thus, an essential element or ingredient in saving faith is a yielding to the authority of God, a submitting of myself to His rule. It is very much more than my understanding, assenting, and my will consenting to the fact that Christ is a Saviour for sinners, and that He stands ready to receive all who trust in Him. To be received by Christ, I must not only come to Him, renouncing all my own righteousness (Rom 10:3), as an empty-handed beggar (Mat 19:21), but I must also forsake my self-will and rebellion against Him (Psa 32:3-5; Pro 28:13). Should an insurrectionist and seditionist come to an earthly king, seeking his sovereign favour and pardon, then, obviously, the very law of his coming to him for forgiveness requires that he should come on his knees, laying aside his hostility. So it is with a sinner who really comes savingly to Christ for pardon. It is against the law of faith to do otherwise.

Saving faith is a genuine *coming to Christ* (Mat 11:28; Joh 6:37, etc.). But let us take care that we do not miss the clear and inevitable implication of this term. If I say, “I *came* to the U.S.A.,” then, I necessarily indicate that I *left* some other country to get here. Thus it is in “coming” to Christ. Something has to be left. Coming to Christ, not only involves the abandoning of every false object of confidence, but it also includes and entails the forsaking of all other competitors for my heart. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now *returned* unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1Pe 2:25). And what is meant by, “Ye *were* [note the past tense—they are no longer so doing] as sheep going *astray*?” Isaiah 53:6 tells us, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to *his own way*.” Ah, that is *what* must be forsaken before we can truly “come” to Christ—that course of self-will must be abandoned. The prodigal son could not *come* to his Father while he remained in the far country. Dear reader, if you are still following a course of self-pleasing, you are only deceiving yourself if you think you have come to Christ.

Nor is the brief definition which we have given above, of what it means to really “come” to Christ, any forced or novel one of our own. In his book, “Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ,” John Bunyan (1628-1688) wrote, “Coming to Christ is attended with an honest and sincere forsaking all for Him (here, he quotes Luke 14:26, 17). “By these and like expressions elsewhere, Christ describeth the true comer. He is one that casteth all behind his back. There are a great many pretended comers to Jesus Christ in the world. They are much like the men you would read of in Matthew 21:30, that said to his father’s bidding, ‘I go, sir,’ and went not. When Christ calls by His Gospel, they say, ‘I come, Sir,’ but they still abide by their pleasures and carnal delights.” C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), in his sermon on John 6:44, said, “Coming to Christ embraces in it repentance, self-abnegation, and faith in the Lord Jesus, and so sums within itself all those things which are the necessary attendants of those great steps of heart, such as the belief of the truth, earnest prayers to God, the submission of the soul to the precepts of His Gospel.” In his sermon on John 6:37, he says, “To come to Christ signifies to turn from sin and to trust in Him.

Coming to Christ is a leaving of all false confidences, a renouncing of all love to sin, and a looking to Jesus as the solitary pillar of our confidence and hope.”

Saving faith consists of the complete surrender of my whole being and life to the claims of God upon me, “But first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5). It is the unreserved acceptance of Christ as my absolute Lord, bowing to His will, and receiving His yoke. Possibly, someone may object, “Then why are Christians exhorted as they are in Romans 12:1?” We answer, all such exhortations are simply a calling on them to *continue as they began*, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6). Yes, mark it well, that Christ is “received” as LORD. O how far, far below the New Testament standard is this modern way of begging sinners to receive Christ as their own personal “Saviour.” If the reader will consult his concordance, he will find that in *every passage* where the two titles are found together, it is *always* “Lord and Saviour,” and never vice versa. See Luke 1:46-47, 11 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18.

Until the ungodly are sensible of the exceeding sinfulness of their vile course of self-will and self-pleasing, until they are genuinely broken down and penitent over it before God, until they are willing to forsake the world for Christ, until they have resolved to come under His government—for such to depend upon Him for pardon and life is not faith, but blatant presumption. It is but to add insult to injury. And for one such to take His holy name upon their polluted lips and profess to be His followers is the most terrible blasphemy, and comes perilously nigh to committing that sin for which there is no forgiveness. Alas, alas, that modern evangelism is encouraging and producing just such hideous and Christ-dishonouring monstrosities.

Saving faith is a believing on Christ with the *heart*, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:9-10).

There is no such thing as a saving *faith* in Christ where there is no real *love* for Him, and by “real love,” we mean a love which is evidenced by *obedience*. Christ acknowledges none to be His friends save those who do whatsoever He commands them (Joh 15:14). As unbelief is a species of rebellion, so saving faith is a complete subjection to God. Hence, we read of “faith obedience” (Rom 16:26). Saving faith is to the soul what health is to the body. It is a mighty principle of operation, full of life, ever working, bringing forth fruit after its own kind.

PRAYER

2. *Praying with the Spirit*

“I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also” (1Co 14:15). Now, to pray with the Spirit—for that is the praying man, and none else, so as to be accepted of God—is for a man (as aforesaid) sincerely, and sensibly, with affection, to come to God through Christ—which sincere, sensible, and affectionate coming must be by

the working of God's Spirit. There is no man, nor church in the world, that can come to God in prayer, but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). Therefore, Paul saith, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to... God" (Rom 8:26-27). Because there is, in this Scripture, so full a discovery of the spirit of prayer, and of man's inability to pray without it, I shall, in a few words, comment upon it.

"For we." Consider, first, the person speaking, even Paul, and in his person, all the apostles. We apostles, we extraordinary officers, the wise master-builders, that have, some of us, been caught up into Paradise. "*We* know not what we should pray for." We know not the matter of the things for which we should pray, neither the object to whom we pray, nor the medium by or through whom we pray. None of these things know we, but, by the help and assistance of the Spirit. Should we pray for communion with God through Christ? Should we pray for faith, for justification by grace, for a truly sanctified heart? None of these things know we. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1Co 2:11).

Again, as they know not the matter of prayer, without the help of the Spirit, so neither know they the manner thereof without the same, and, therefore, he adds, "*We* know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." They could not so well and so fully come off in the manner of performance of this duty, as these, in our days, think they can. The apostles, when they were at the best, yea, when the Holy Spirit assisted them, yet then they were feign to come off with sighs and groans, thus falling short of expressing their minds.

Mark the, "as we ought." We cannot do so by all the art, skill, cunning, and devise of men or angels. It must be the Spirit itself that helpeth our infirmities. Many ask and have not, because they ask amiss, and so are never the nearer enjoying those things they petition for. It is not to pray at random which causes God to answer. While prayer is being made, God is searching the heart to see from what root and spirit it doth arise. And He that searcheth the heart, knoweth (that is, approveth) the meaning of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. In that which is according to His will only, He heareth us. And none, but the Spirit, can teach us so to act. He alone being able to search out all things, even the deep things of God. Without which Spirit, though we have a thousand prayer-books, yet we would not know what we should pray for as we ought, being accompanied with those infirmities that make us absolutely incapable of such a work. Which infirmities, although it is a hard thing to name them all, yet some of them are these that follow:

1. Without the Spirit, man is so infirm that he cannot, with all other means whatsoever, be enabled to think one right saving thought of God, of Christ, of His blessed things. And, therefore, He saith of the wicked, "God is not in all their thoughts" (Psa 10:4), unless it be that they imagine Him altogether such a one as themselves. "That every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). They, then, not being able to conceive aright of God to whom they pray, of Christ through whom they pray, nor of the

things for which they pray, how shall they be able to address themselves to God, without the Spirit helping this infirmity. The Spirit itself is the revealer of these things to poor souls, and that which doth give us to understand them.

Right prayer must, as well in the outward part of it, in the outward expression, as in the inward intention, come from what the soul doth apprehend in the light of the Spirit. Otherwise, it is condemned as vain and an abomination, because the heart and tongue do not go along jointly in the same. Neither, indeed, can they, unless the Spirit help our infirmities. This, David knew full well, and made him cry, "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (Psa 51:15). I suppose there is none can imagine but that David could speak and express himself as well as others, nay, as any in our generation, as is clearly manifested by his word and his works. Nevertheless, when this good man, this prophet, comes into God's worship, then, the Lord must help, or he can do nothing. He should not speak on right word, except the Spirit itself gave utterance.

2. It must be praying with the Spirit, that is, the effectual praying, because, without that, men are senseless, hypocritical, cold, and unseemly in their prayers. And so they, with their prayers, are both rendered abominable to God. It is not the excellency of the voice, nor the seeming affection and earnestness of him that prayeth, that is in anything regarded of God without it. For man, as man, is so full of manner of wickedness, that, as he cannot keep a word or thought, so much less a piece of prayer clean and acceptable to God, and for this cause, the Pharisees with their prayers, were rejected. No question, but they were well able to express themselves in words, and also for length of time, too, they were very notable. But, they had not the Spirit of Jesus Christ to help them, and, therefore, they did what they did with their infirmities or weaknesses only. And so fell short of a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of their souls to God, through the strength of the Spirit. *That* is the prayer that goeth to heaven that is sent thither in the power of the Spirit.

3. Nothing but the Spirit can show a man his misery by nature, and so put a man into a posture of prayer. Talk is but talk, and so it is but mouth-worship, if there be not a sense of misery, and that effectually, too. O the cursed hypocrisy that is in most hearts, and that accompanieth many thousands of praying men that would be so looked upon in this day, and all for want of a sense of their misery! But now the Spirit, that will sweetly show the soul its misery, where it is, and what is like to become of it, also, the intolerableness of that condition. For it is the Spirit that doth effectually convince of sin and misery, without the Lord Jesus, and so puts the soul into a sweet, serious, sensible, affectionate way of praying to God according to His Word.

4. If men did see their sins, yet, without the help of the Spirit, they would not pray. For they would run away from God with Cain and Judas, and utterly despair of mercy, were it not for the Spirit. When a man is indeed sensible of his sin and God's curse, then, it is a hard thing to persuade him to pray. For, saith his heart, "There is no hope. It is in vain to seek God. I am so vile, so wretched, and so cursed a creature, that I shall never be regarded." Now, here comes the Spirit, and stayeth the soul, helpeth it to hold up its face to God, by letting into the heart some small sense of mercy, to encourage it to God, and hence, He is called the Comforter.

5. It must be in, or with, the Spirit. For without that, no man can know how he should come to God the right way. Men may easily say they come to God in His Son. But it is the

hardest thing of a thousand to come to God aright and in His own way, without the Spirit. It is the Spirit that searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. It is the Spirit that must show us the way of coming to God, and also what there is in God that makes Him desirable. "I pray thee, [saith Moses] show me now thy way that I may know thee" (Exo 33:13). "He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (Joh 16:15).

6. Because without the Spirit, though a man did see his misery, and also the way to come to God, yet he would never be able to claim a share in either God, Christ, nor mercy, without God's approbation. O how great a task is it for a poor soul that comes sensible of sin, and the wrath of God, to say in faith, but this one word, Father! I tell you, however hypocrites think, yet the Christian that is so indeed, finds all the difficulty in this very thing—it cannot say that God is its Father. Oh! Saith he, "I dare not call Him Father," and hence, it is that the Spirit is sent into the hearts of God's children for this very thing, to cry Father. It being too great a work for any man to do knowingly and believingly without it! When I say knowingly, I mean knowing what it is to be a child of God and to be born again. And when I say believingly, I mean, for the soul to believe, and that from good experience, that the work of grace is wrought within him. This is the right calling of God, "Father," and not as many do, to say in a babbling way, the Lord's prayer, as it lieth in the words of the book.

Here is the life of prayer, when a man, being made sensible of sin and how to come to the Lord for mercy, he comes, I say, in the strength of the Spirit, and crieth, "Father." That one word spoken in faith is better than a thousand prayers, as men call them, written and read, in a formal, cold, lukewarm way. O how far short are they of being sensible of this, who count it enough to teach themselves and their children to say the Lord's prayer, the creed, etc. When, as God knows, they are senseless of themselves, their misery, or what it is to be brought to God through Christ. Ah, poor soul! Study your misery, and cry to God to show you your blindness and ignorance, before you be too rife in calling God your Father, or learn your children so to say. And know, that to say God is your Father, in a way of prayer, without an experience of the work of grace on your souls, is to say you are Jews and are not, and so do lie.

Give me leave a little to reason with thee. It may be thy great prayer is to say, "Our Father which art in heaven," etc. Dost thou know the meaning of the very first words of this verse? Art thou truly born again? Hast thou received the Spirit of adoption? Dost thou see thyself in Christ and canst thou come to God as a member of Him? Or, art thou ignorant of these things, and yet darest say, "*Our* Father!" Is not the devil *thy* father, and dost thou not do the deeds of the flesh, and yet darest thou say to God, "Our Father." Nay, art thou not a desperate persecutor of the children of God? Hast thou not cursed them in thine heart many a time? And yet out of thy blasphemous throat thou sufferest these words to come, even, "Our Father"? He is *their* Father whom thou hatest. But, as the devil presented himself among the sons of God, when they were to present themselves before the Father, so it is now. Because the saints are commanded to say, "Our Father," therefore, all the blind, ignorant rabble in the world must also use the same words.

And dost thou indeed say, "Hallowed be Thy name," with thy heart? Dost thou study, by all honest and lawful ways, to advance the name, holiness, and majesty of God? Doth thy heart *and life* agree with this passage? Dost thou strive to imitate Christ in all the works

of righteousness which God doth command of thee? It *is* so, if thou be one that can truly, with *God's* allowance, cry, "Our Father." And dost thou not clearly make it appear that thou art a cursed hypocrite, by condemning that with thy daily practice, which thou pretendest in thy praying with thy dissembling tongue?

Wouldest thou have "the kingdom" of God "come" indeed, and also *His* will be done in earth as it is done in heaven? Nay, notwithstanding thou, according to the *form*, sayest, "Thy kingdom come," yet would it make thee ready to run mad, to hear the trumpet sound, to see the dead arise to reckon for all the deeds thou hast done in the body? Nay, are not the very thoughts of it altogether displeasing to thee? And if God's will *should* be done on earth as it is in heaven, must it not be *thy ruin*? There is never a rebel in heaven against God, and if He should so deal on earth, must He not whirl thee down to hell? And so of the rest of thy petitions. Ah! How sadly would these men look, and with what terror would they walk up and down the world, if they did but know the lying and blaspheming that proceedeth out of their mouth, even in their most pretended sanctity? The Lord awaken you, and learn you, poor souls, in all humility, to take heed that you be not rash and unadvised with your heart, and much more with your mouth, when you appear before God.

7. It must be a prayer with the Spirit, if it be accepted, because there is nothing but the Spirit that can lift up the soul or heart to God in prayer. "The preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD" (Pro 16:1). That is, in every work for God (and especially in prayer), if the heart run with the tongue, it must be prepared by the Spirit of God. Indeed, the tongue is very apt (of itself) to run without either fear or wisdom. But when it is the answer of the heart, and that, such a heart as is prepared by the Spirit of God, then it speaks so as God commands and doth desire. They are mighty words of David where he saith that he "lifteth his heart and his soul to God." It is a great work for any man without the strength of the Spirit, and therefore, I conceive that this is one of the great reasons why the Spirit of God is called, "The Spirit of grace and supplications" (Zec 12:10). Because it is He which helpeth the heart when it supplicates indeed, to do it, and therefore, saith Paul, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18), and "I will pray with the Spirit" (1Co 14:15). Prayer, unless the heart be in it, is like a sound without life, and a heart, unless it be lifted up of the Spirit, will never pray to God.

8. As the heart must be lifted up by the Spirit, if it pray aright, so also must it be *held* by the Spirit when it is up, if it *continue* to pray aright. I do not know what or how it is with others' hearts, whether they be lifted up by the Spirit of God, and so continued, or no, but this I am sure of—first, it is impossible that all the prayer books that men have made in the world should lift up or prepare the hearts. *That* is the work of the great God Himself. And, second, I am sure that they are as far from keeping it up, when it is up. And indeed, here is the life of prayer—to have the heart *kept with God* in the duty. It was a great matter for Moses to keep his hands lifted up to God in prayer, but how much more than to keep the heart up!

The want of this is that which God complains of, that, "This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and *honour* me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Mat 15:8). And verily, may I but speak my own experience, and from that tell you the difficulty of praying to God as I ought. It is enough to make you poor, blind, carnal men to entertain strange thoughts of me. For, as for my heart, when I go to pray, I find it loth to go to God,

and when it is with Him, so loth to stay with Him that many times I am forced in my prayers, first, to beg of God that He would take my heart and set it on Himself in Christ, and when it is there, that He would keep it there. Nay, many times I know not what to pray for, I am so blind, nor how to pray, I am so ignorant. Only, blessed be grace, the Spirit helps our infirmities. Oh! The starting-holds that the heart hath in times of prayer! None knows how many byways the heart hath, and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God. How much pride also, if enabled with expressions. How much hypocrisy, if before others. And how little conscience is there made of prayer between God and the soul in secret, unless the Spirit of supplication be there to help. When the Spirit gets into the heart, then there is prayer indeed, and not till then.

9. The soul that doth rightly pray, it must be in and with the help and strength of the Spirit, because it is impossible that a man should express himself in prayer without it. When I say it is impossible for a man to express himself in prayer without it, I mean that it is impossible that the heart in a sincere and sensible, affectionate way, should pour out itself before God with those groans and sighs that come from a truly praying heart, without the assistance of the Spirit. It is not the mouth that is the main thing to be looked at in prayer, but whether the heart be so full of affection and earnestness in prayer with God, that it is impossible to express their sense and desire. For then a man yearns indeed, when his desires are so strong, many, and mighty, that all the words, tears, and groans, that can come from the heart, cannot utter them.

A man that truly prays one prayer shall, afterward, never be able to express with his mouth or pen the unutterable desires, sense, affection, and longing that went to God in that prayer. The best prayers have often more groans than words, and those words that it hath are but a lean and shallow representation of the heart, life, and spirit of that prayer. You do not find any words of prayer, that we read of, come out of the mouth of Moses when he was gone out of Egypt and was followed by Pharaoh, and yet he made heaven ring again with his cry, but it was the inexpressible and unsearchable groans and cryings of his soul in and with the spirit. God is the God of spirit, and His eyes look further than at the outside of any duty whatsoever.

The nearer a man comes in any work that God commands him, to the doing of it according to His will, so much the more hard and difficult it is, and the reason is, because man, as man, is not able to do it. But prayer (as aforesaid) is not only a duty, but one of the most eminent duties, and therefore, so much the more difficult.

10. It must be with the Spirit or else there will be a failing in the act itself, so there will be a failing, yea, a fainting, in the prosecution of the work. Prayer is an ordinance of God that must continue with a soul so long as it is on this side glory. But, as I said before, it is not possible for a man to get up his heart to God in prayer. So, it is as difficult to keep it there without the assistance of the Spirit. And if so, then for a man to continue some time in prayer with God, it must of necessity be with the Spirit. Christ tells us that, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luk 18:1). And again tells us that this is one definition of a hypocrite, that either he will not continue in prayer, or else if he do, it will not be in the power, that is, in the spirit of prayer, but in the form, or a pretense only. It is the easiest thing of a hundred to fall from the power to the form, but it is the hardest thing of many to

keep in the life, spirit, and power of any one duty, especially prayer. *That* is such a work, that a man without the help of the Spirit cannot so much as pray once, much less continue.

Jacob did not only begin, but held to it, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26). So did the rest of the godly. But this could not be without the spirit of the prayer. It is by one Spirit that we have access unto the Father (Eph 2:18). That same is a remarkable place in Jude, when he stirreth up the saints by the judgment of God upon the wicked, to stand fast and continue to hold out in the faith of the Gospel, as one excellent means thereto, without which he knew they would never be able to do it. Saith he, "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, *praying in the Holy Ghost*" (Jude 1:20). As if he had said, "Brethren, as eternal life is laid up for the persons which hold out only, so you cannot hold out unless you continue praying in the Spirit." The great cheat that the devil deludes the world with is to make them continue in the form of any duty, the form of preaching, of hearing, of praying, etc. These are they that have "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2Ti 3:5) John Bunyan, 1660.

THE EYE OF FAITH

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine *eye* seeth thee" (Job 42:5). What did Job signify by this? Obviously, his words are not to be understood literally. No, by employing a common figure of speech, he meant that the mists of unbelief (occasioned by self-righteousness) had now been dispelled, and faith perceived the being of God as a glorious and living reality. "Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD" (Psa 25:15), by which is meant that his *faith* was constantly in exercise. Of Moses, it is said that, "He endured, as *seeing* him who is invisible" (Heb 11:27). That is, his heart was sustained through faith's being occupied with the mighty God.

Faith is frequently represented in Scripture under the metaphor of bodily sight. Our Lord said of the great patriarch, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he *saw* it, and was glad" (Joh 8:56), meaning that his *faith* looked forward to the day of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Paul was commissioned unto the Gentiles to "open their eyes,...to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Act 26:18), or, in other words, to be the divine instrument of their conversion through preaching to them the Word of faith. To some of his erring children, he wrote, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose *eyes* Jesus Christ hath been evidently [plainly] set forth, crucified among you" (Gal 3:1).

Now, what we wish to point out in this article is that when Scripture speaks of faith, under the notion of bodily sight, its writers were doing something more than availing themselves of a pertinent and suitable figure of speech. The Author of Scripture is the One who first formed the eye—that marvelous organ of vision—and without a shadow of doubt, He *so* fashioned it as to strikingly adumbrate in the visible that which now plays so prominent a part in the Christian's dealing with the invisible. Everything in the material

world shadows forth some great reality in the spiritual realm, as we should perceive had we but sufficient wisdom to discern the fact. A wide field is here opened for observation and meditation, but we shall now confine ourselves to a single example, namely, the eye of the body as it symbolizes the faith of the heart.

1. The eye is a *passive* organ. The eye does not send out a light from itself, nor does it give anything unto the objects it beholds—what can the eye communicate to the sun, moon, and stars when it gazes upon them! No, the eye merely *receives* the print or image of them into the mind (on the retina, which is then transmitted to the brain) without adding anything to them. Just so is it with faith. It gives nothing to God or to what it beholds in the Word of His grace. It simply *receives* or takes them into the heart as they are presented to the soul's view in the light of the divine revelation. What did the bitten Israelites communicate unto the brazen serpent when they looked unto it and were healed? As little do we add unto Christ when we "look" unto Him and are saved (Isa 45:22).

2. The eye is a *directing* organ. The man that has the light of day and his eyes open can see his way, and is not so likely to stumble into ditches or fall into a precipice as a blind man, or one who walks at nighttime. So it is with faith. "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble," but "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro 4:18-19). Of Christians, it is said that, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7). By "*looking off* unto Jesus" (faith's viewing our Exemplar), we are enabled to run the race which is set before us.

3. The eye is a very *quick* organ, taking up things at a great distance. Within a fraction of a moment, I can turn my gaze from things lying on the ground, and focus it upon the mountains which are many miles away. Nay, more, I can look away altogether from the things of earth and mount up among the stars, and in a second view the entire expanse of the heavens. What an optical marvel is that! Equally wonderful is the power of faith. It is indeed a quick-sighted grace, taking up things at a great distance, as the faith of the patriarchs did, who saw the things promised "afar off" (Heb 11:13). So too, in a moment, faith may look back to an eternity past and view the everlasting springs of electing love, active on its behalf before the foundations of the earth were laid, and then, in the same breath, it can turn itself towards an eternity yet to come, and take a view of the hidden glories of an invisible world within the veil.

4. The eye, though it be little, is a very *capacious* organ. The man that has the light of day, and has his eyes open, may see all that comes within the range of his vision. He may look around and see things behind and forward and view things ahead, downward upon the waters in a well or a stream at the bottom of a deep ravine, upwards and gaze upon the bodies in the distant heavens. So is it with faith. It extends itself unto everything that lies within the vast compass of God's Word. It takes knowledge of things in the distant past. It also apprehends things that are yet to come. It looks into hell, and penetrates into heaven. It is able to discern the vanity of the world all around us.

It is true that there may be a genuine faith that takes in but little of the light of divine revelation at first. Yet, here again, the earthly adumbration accurately shadows forth this spiritual truth. The eye of an infant takes in the light and perceives external objects, but with a good deal of weakness and confusion, until, as it grows more, its vision extends further and further. So it is with the eye of faith. At first, the light of spiritual knowledge is

but dim. The babe in Christ is unable to see afar off. But as faith grows, it takes in more of God, more of Christ, more of things above. It wades deeper and deeper into the divine mysteries, until it comes, at length, to be swallowed up in open vision (Joh 17:24).

5. The eye is a very *assuring* faculty. Of the five bodily senses, this is the most convincing. What are we more sure of than what we see with our eyes! Some fools may seek to persuade themselves that matter is a mental delusion, but no one in his right mind will believe them. If a man sees the sun shining in the heavens, he *knows* that it is day. In like manner, faith is a grace which carries in its very nature a great deal of certainty. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). Sceptics may deny the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, but when the eye of faith has gazed upon its supernatural beauties, the point is settled once for all. Others may regard the Christ of God as a pious myth, but once the saint has really beheld the Lamb of God, it can say, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth."

6. The eye is an *impressing* organ. What we see leaves an impression upon our minds. That is why we need to pray often, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Psa 119:37). That is why the prophet declared, "Mine eye affecteth mine heart" (Lam 3:51). If a man looks steadily at the sun for a few moments, an impression of the sun is left in his eye, even though he turn his eyes away from it, or shut them. In like manner, real faith leaves an impression of the Sun of righteousness upon the heart, "They looked unto him, and were lightened" (Psa 34:5). Even more definite is 11 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are *changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." As the mighty power of Christ will, in a coming day, transform the bodies of His people from mortality to life and from dishonour to glory, so also does the Holy Spirit now exert a moral transforming power on the character of those who are His, and that by calling faith into exercise, the activity of which more and more conforms the soul to the image of God's Son.

7. The eye is a *wondrous* organ. Those, who are competent to express an opinion, affirm that this particular member is the most curious and remarkable of any part of the human body. There is much of the wisdom and power of the Creator to be discovered in the formation of the visive faculty. So too, faith is a grace that is curiously and wondrously wrought in the soul. There is more of the wisdom and power of the divine Workman discovered in the formation of the grace of faith than in any other part of the new creature. Thus, we read of the "work of faith with power" (2Th 1:11). Yea, that the same exceeding great and mighty power which was put forth by God in the raising of Christ from the dead is exerted upon and within them that believe (Eph 1:19).

8. The eye of the body is a very *tender* thing. It is soon hurt and easily damaged. A very tiny cinder will cause pain and make it weep—and it is very striking to note that *that* is the very way to recovery—it weeps out the dust or mote that gets into it. So too, faith is a most delicate grace, thriving best in a pure conscience. Hence, the apostle speaks of, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1Ti 3:9). The lively actings of faith are soon marred by the dust of sin, or by the vanities of the world getting into the heart where it is seated. And where ever true faith is, if it be hurt by sin, it vents itself in a way of godly sorrow.

[For most of the above, we are indebted to a sermon preached by Ebenezer Erskine, 1680-1754].

