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**STUDIES**  
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*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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

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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“*Search the Scriptures*” John 5:39

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## THE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST

Christ is King in a twofold sense. First, as He is God, second, as He is God-man Mediator. As God, He is King by *nature*. As Mediator, He is so by *office*. As the second person in the Trinity, Christ is “*over all, God blessed forever*” (Rom 9:5). Being the Creator, He has the right of dominion over all His creatures. “But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an *everlasting King*” (Jer 10:10). All that God is essentially, Christ is too. As Mediator, His kingdom is limited and special, concerning only the elect of God and others, as they may have to do with them. And therefore, in *this* relation, Christ is called, “The King of *saints*” (Rev 15:3), for they bow to His scepter and delight in His rule.

That Christ is “King” appears, first, from the Father’s designation and ordination of Him to this office. “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psa 2:6). The primary reference in this is to the setting up of Christ (Pro 8:23) in God’s eternal purpose over His Church—note the “I will declare *the decree*” in Psalm 2:7. God calls Him, “*My king*,” because of His choosing Him. As God appointed Christ to be a King, so He also appointed a kingdom to Him. This was observed by Christ, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me” (Luk 22:29).

Second, it appears from the types and shadows which prefigured Christ in His kingly office. “Melchizedek was a type of Him; not only in his priestly office, but in his kingly office; both offices meeting in him, as they do in Christ, who is a priest upon His throne. From his quality as a king, he had his name Melchizedek, meaning ‘king of righteousness,’ and such a one is Christ, Who reigns in righteousness; and from the place of His government, ‘king of Salem,’ that is, ‘king of peace’; agreeable to which one of Christ’s titles is ‘Prince of peace’ (Isa 9:6). David was an eminent type of Christ in His kingly office, for his wisdom and military skill, his courage and valour, his wars and victories,

and the equity and justice of his government. Hence, Christ, his antitype, is often (with respect to the Jews in the latter days) called, '*David* their king' (Jer 30:9; Eze 33:23; 37:3-24; Hos 3:5). Solomon also was a type of Christ as king. Hence, Christ, in the Song of Solomon, is called, '*Solomon*' (Song 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12), because of His great wisdom, His immense riches, the largeness and peaceableness of His kingdom" (John Gill, 1697-1771).

Third, it appears from the prophecies concerning Him in this connection. In the first of all, it was said that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head, that is, destroy the devil and all his works (1Jo 3:8). *That* is an act of Christ's kingly power and is expressive of Him as a victorious Prince and triumphant Conqueror over all believers and His people's enemies. Balaam foretold, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a *Scepter* shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). Isaiah announced, "The government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa 9:6). Jeremiah affirmed, "The days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper" (Jer 23:5). Daniel owned Him as, "Messiah the Prince" (Dan 9:25). Zechariah declared, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation" (Zec 9:9).

We shall now proceed to show that the purpose of God has been accomplished, the types realized, and the prophecies fulfilled—that Christ is King in truth and in deed. First, He was so *before* His incarnation, during the Old Testament dispensation. He was King over the people *of Israel*, not as a body politic, but as a "Church" (Act 7:38). He it was from Whose right hand went the fiery law, when He spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. He was the "Angel" that went before them to guide and direct, to rule and govern them, Whose voice they were to obey (Exo 23:20-21). He it was who appeared to Joshua, with drawn sword in His hand, to be the Captain of the Lord's hosts, fight their battles for them and settle them in the land of Canaan (Jos 5). He it was who said to Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not *reign* over them" (1Sa 8:7).

Christ was King in the days of His humiliation. He was "born King of the Jews" (Mat 2:2). Nathanael made the following noble confession of faith concerning Him, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (Joh 1:49). When He entered Jerusalem in a very public manner, He was greeted with, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the LORD" (Luk 19:38). He displayed His kingly power by commanding the elements, rebuking disease, expelling demons, all of which were subject to His imperial will. He exercised His kingly prerogative by displaying His legislative authority, "I say unto you" (Mat 5). Before He left this earth, He appointed ordinances and commissioned His ministers (Mat 28).

Upon His ascension to heaven, He was "made both Lord and Christ" (Act 2:36), that is, He was both publicly declared to be so and made *more manifest* as such. He was highly exalted, and given a name above every name, "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1Pe 3:22). He, then, received the promise of the Holy Spirit and His gifts from the Father, which He plentifully bestowed upon His apostles, whom He sent forth into all the world, preaching His Gospel with great success and causing them to triumph in Him in every place where they came. "The Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mar 16:20). As King, He made the arrows of His Word sharp in the hearts of His enemies, the rod of His strength (the Gospel) went

forth out of Zion, making many willing to submit themselves unto Him in the day of His power, whereby His kingdom was greatly strengthened in this world.

There are those who emphatically deny that Christ has yet taken unto Himself His kingly office, supposing He will not do so until the millennium. This is a serious error. Every mark of royalty is *now* to be found in Christ. Were kings “anointed” (1Sa 10:1, 2Sa 2:4)? So has Christ been “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows” (Heb 1:9). Were kings coronated at the time of their inauguration? So has Christ been “*crowned with glory and honour*” (Heb 2:7). Do kings sit on thrones when in state (1Ki 2:19; 10:18)? So Christ “is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1). Do kings hold scepters in their hands as an ensign of their royalty? So Christ has “a scepter of righteousness” (Heb 1:8). Do kings appear in robes of majesty and state? So Christ is arrayed with majesty itself, “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a *golden* girdle. His head and his hairs white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes as a flame of fire” (Rev 1:13-14). Do kings appoint ambassadors to represent their interests abroad? So the apostles announced, “We are ambassadors for Christ” (2Co 5:20). Are kings possessed of authority and might to execute their wills? So Christ declared, “All power *is* given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18).

Even *now*, Christ is “prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5). Even *now*, He has “the key of David” and *uses* it, by opening doors which none can shut, and shutting doors which none can open (Rev 3:7). God has already exalted Him with His right hand “to be a *Prince* and a Saviour” (Act 5:31). God has already “given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (Joh 5:27). Ever since His ascension, He has been “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3). Today, He is “the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*, the only wise God” (1Ti 1:17). But “in his times he shall *show*, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1Ti 6:15).

And what is the practical application which must be made to us individually of what has been before us? This is Christ *our* “King”? or is the language of our hearts, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14)? Ah, my readers, this is no mere academical inquiry, or one for “dispensationalists” to fight over. It is a question of vital moment, and our real answer to it evidences whether we are really *saved* or no. If Christ be not my “King” in a practical way, then (no matter what my profession), I am a *rebel against* Him. Can I truly say His will is my law, His Word my rule of life, His scepter the authority I own? Can I truthfully say, “‘Other lords beside thee *have had* dominion over me’ (Isa 26:13), but, henceforth, I own no other King but Thee, no rule but Thine”? Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him, *in your heart and life*, “Lord of all.”

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### *53. The Apostates' Doom (10:28-31)*

The verses, which are now to be before us, complete the section begun in Hebrews 10:26, the sum of which is the apostates' doom. They fall naturally into two parts, the one containing a description of their sin, the other, a declaration of their punishment. For the purpose of solemn emphasis, each of these is repeated. In Hebrews 10:26 and in verse 27, the punishment of it is affirmed. In verses 28-29, the apostle confirms the equity of the forenamed judgment by an argument drawn from the Mosaic law, under which he shows the terrible character of the sin which is here in view. In Hebrews 10:30-31, he establishes the certainty of the punishment by an appeal to the character of God as revealed in His Word. This repetition, in a subject so solemn, is well calculated to awe every thoughtful reader, and ought to produce the most searching effect upon his conscience and heart.

As we have pointed out in preceding articles, this section (Heb 10:26-31) was introduced by the apostle for the purpose of enforcing the exhortation found in verses 22-24, the sum of which is, a call unto Christians to persevere in a state and practice of godliness. Grossly has this passage been perverted by theological factions belonging to two extremes. The one has misused it in the endeavour to bolster up their false doctrine of regenerated people falling from grace and being eternally lost. Without now going into that subject, it is sufficient to say that Hebrews 10:26-31 contains not a word which *directly* supports the chief contention of the Arminians. What we have in this passage is only hypothetical, "For *if* we sin willingly," i.e. deliberately, fully, and finally abandon the profession of Christianity—*not* that the Holy Spirit here says any of the regenerate Hebrews *had* or *would* do so. A similar, and still more pointed case, is found in those words of Christ's, "Yet ye have not known him: but I know him: and *if* I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you" (Joh 8:55).

The second party, of those who have misunderstood this passage, are Calvinists possessing more zeal than wisdom. Anxious to maintain their ground against the Arminians, most of them have devoted their energies to show that regenerated Christians do not come within the scope of Hebrews 10:26 at all. That instead, it treats only of nominal professors, of those having nothing more than a head-knowledge of the truth, and making merely a lip-profession of the same. And thus has the great enemy of souls succeeded in getting some of the true servants of God to blunt the sharp edge of this solemn verse, and nullify its searching power over the conscience of the saints. It is sufficient refutation of this theory to point out that the apostle is here addressing those who were "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1), and in the "we" of Hebrews 10:26, *included* himself! We will not take any notice of a third theory of modern "dispensationalists," who affirm that none but *Jews* could commit the sin here mentioned, beyond saying that our space is too valuable to waste in exposing such trifling with Holy Scripture.

But what has been pointed out above presents a serious difficulty to many. We may state it thus—If it be impossible for truly regenerated people to ever perish, then why

should the Holy Spirit move the apostle to so much as hypothetically describe their irremediable doom *if* they should apostatize? Such a difficulty is occasioned, in the first place, through a *one-sided* conception of the Christian—through considering him only as he exists in the purpose of God, and not also remembering what he still is in himself. Unless the latter be steadily held in mind, we are in grave danger of denying, or at least ignoring, the Christian's *responsibility*. That the Christian *is* to be viewed in this twofold way is abundantly clear from many Scriptures. For example, in the purpose of God, the Christian is already "glorified" (Rom 8:30), yet he certainly is not so in himself! Here, in Hebrews 10:26, etc. (as in many other passages) the Christian is *not* addressed from the viewpoint of God's eternal purpose, but as he yet is in himself—in need of solemn warnings, as well as exhortations.

Again, the difficulty which so many one-sided thinkers find in this subject is to be attributed to their failure in duly recognizing the *relation* which God has appointed between His own eternal counsels and the accomplishment of the same through wisely ordained *means*. There are some who reason (most superficially) that if God has ordained a certain soul to be saved, he *will* be, whether he exercised faith in Christ or no. Not so! 2 Thessalonians 2:13 clearly proves the contrary—the "end" and the "means" are there inseparably joined together. It is quite true that where God has appointed a certain individual "unto salvation," He will infallibly give him a saving faith, but that does not mean that the Holy Spirit will believe *for* him. No, the individual will, must, *exercise* the faith which has been given him. In like manner, God has eternally decreed that every regenerated soul shall get safely through to heaven, yet He certainly has not ordained that any shall do so whether or not they use the means which He has appointed for their preservation. Christians are "kept by the power of God *through faith*" (1Pe 1:5). *There* is the human responsibility side.

Looked at as he still is in himself, the Christian is eminently liable to make shipwreck of the faith (1Ti 1:19). He still has within him a nature which craves the vanities of the world, and that craving has to be denied, or he will never reach heaven. He is yet in the place of terrible danger, menaced by deadly temptations, and it is only as he constantly watches and prays against the same that he is preserved from them. He is the immediate and incessant object of the devil's malice, for he is ever going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And it is only as the Christian takes unto himself (appropriates and uses) the armour of God's providing, that he can withstand the great enemy of souls. It is because of these things that he urgently needs the exhortations and warnings of Holy Writ. God has faithfully pointed out to us what lies at the end of every path of self-will and self-indulgence. God has mercifully placed a hedge across each precipice which confronts the professing Christian, and woe be to him if he disregards those warnings and pushes through that hedge.

In this solemn passage of Hebrews 10, the apostle is pointing out the sure and certain connection there is between apostasy and irrevocable damnation, thereby, warning all who bear the name of Christ to take the most careful and constant pains in *avoiding* that unpardonable sin. To say that real Christians need no such warning because they *cannot* possibly commit *that* sin is, we repeat, to lose sight of the connection which God Himself has established between His predestined *ends* and the *means* whereby they are reached.

The end unto which God has predestined His people is their eternal bliss in heaven, and one of the means, by which that end is reached, is through their taking heed to the solemn warning He has given against that which would prevent their reaching heaven. It is not wisdom, but madness, to scoff at those warnings. As well might Joseph have objected that there was no need for him and his family to flee into Egypt (Mat 2), seeing that it was *impossible* for the Christ Child to be slain by Herod!

What each of us needs to watch against is the first buddings of apostasy, the first steps which lead to that sin of sins. It is not reached at a single bound, but is the fatal culmination of a diseased heart. Thus, while the writer and the reader may be in no immediate danger of apostasy itself, we *are* of that which, if allowed and continued in, would certainly lead to it. A man who is now enjoying good health is in no immediate danger of dying from tuberculosis, yet if he recklessly exposed himself to the wet and cold, if he refrained from taking that nourishing food which supplies strength to resist disease, or had he a heavy cough on the chest and made no effort to break it up, then would he very likely fall a victim to consumption. So it is spiritually. Nay, in the case of the Christian, the *seed* of eternal death is already in him. That seed is *sin* and it is only as grace is daily and diligently sought, for the thwarting of its inclinations and suppressing of its activities, that it is hindered from fully developing to a fatal end.

A small leak neglected will sink a ship just as effectually as the most boisterous sea. So one sin indulged in and not repented of, will terminate in eternal punishment. Well did John Owen (1616-1683) say, "We ought to take heed of every neglect of the Person of Christ and of His authority, lest we enter into some degree or other of the guilt of this great offense." Or, still better, well may both writer and reader earnestly cry unto God, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psa 19:13). Rightly did C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) say on this verse, "Secret sin is a steppingstone to presumptuous sin, and *that* is the vestibule of 'the sin which is unto death'" (Treasury of David). To sin "presumptuously" is to knowingly and deliberately ignore God's commandments, defying His authority, and recklessly going on in a course of self-pleasing regardless of consequences. When one has reached that terrible stage, he is but a short step indeed from committing the sin for which there is no forgiveness, and then to be abandoned by God both in this world and in that which is to come.

As this solemn subject is so vitally related to our eternal welfare, and as the pulpit and religious press of today maintain a guilty silence thereon, let us briefly point out some of the steps which inevitably lead to "presumptuous" sinning. When a professing Christian ceases to maintain a daily repentance and confession to God of all known sins, his conscience is already asleep and no longer responsive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. If over and above this, he comes before God as a worshipper, to praise and thank Him for mercies received, he is but dissembling, and mocking Him. If he continues in a state of impenitence, thus allowing and siding with the sin into which, at first, he was unwittingly and unwillingly betrayed, his heart will be so hardened that he will commit new sins deliberately, against light and knowledge, and that with a high hand, and thus be guilty of *presumptuous* sins, of openly defying God.



The terrible thing is that, in these degenerate times, the consciences of thousands have been drugged by preachers (whom it is greatly to be feared are themselves spiritually dead, and helping forward the work of Satan) that have presented “the eternal security of the saints” in such an unscriptural way, as to convey to their poor hearers the impression that, provided they once “accepted Christ as their personal Saviour,” heaven is now their certain portion, that guilt can nevermore rest upon them, and that no matter what sins they may commit, nothing can possibly jeopardize their eternal interests. The consequence has been—and this is no imaginary fear of ours, but a patent fact of observation on every side—that a carnal security has been imparted, so that in the midst of fleshly gratification and worldly living, it is, humanly speaking, quite impossible to disturb their false peace or terrify their conscience.

All around us are professing Christians sinning with a high hand against God, and yet suffering from no qualms of conscience. And why? Because while they believe that some “millennial crown” or “reward” may be forfeited should they fail to deny self and daily take up their cross and follow Christ, yet they have not the slightest realization or fear that *they* are hastening to hell as swiftly as time wings its flight. They fondly imagine that the blood of Christ covers all their sins. Horrible blasphemy! Dear reader, make no mistake upon this point, and suffer no false prophet to cause you to believe the contrary, the blood of Christ covers *no sins that have not been truly repented of and confessed to God with a broken heart*. But presumptuous sins are not easily repented of, for they *harden* the heart and make it steel itself against God. In proof note, “But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent” (Zec 7:11-12).

Rightly then does Thomas Scott (1747-1821) say on Hebrews 10:26, “We cannot too awfully alarm the secure, self-confident, and presumptuous, as every deliberate sin against light and conscience, is a step towards the tremendous precipice described by the apostle.” Alas, alas, Satan has, through the “Bible teachers,” done his work so well that, unless the Holy Spirit performs a miracle, it is impossible to “alarm” such. The great masses of professing Christians of our day regard God Himself much as they would an indulgent old man in his dotage, who so loves his grandchildren as to be blind to all their faults. The ineffably holy God of Scripture is not longer believed in. But multitudes will yet find, to their eternal sorrow, that it is “a *fearful* thing” to fall into *His* hands. We make no apology for this lengthy introduction, for our aim is not so much to write a commentary on this epistle, as it is to reach the consciences and hearts of poor, misguided, and deluded souls, who have been fearfully deceived by the very men whom they have regarded as the champions of orthodoxy.

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:28-29). Having named the principal means for the Christian’s maintenance of constancy in the faith (Heb 10:22-25), the apostle proceeded to enforce his exhortations to perseverance, and against backsliding and apostasy, by some weighty considerations. First, from the

terrible character of the sin of apostasy. It is a sinning willingly after a knowledge of the truth has been received and assented to, verse 26. Second, from the dreadful state of such, no sacrifice avails for them, naught but judgment awaits them, verses 26-27. Third, from the analogy of God's severity in the past, verses 28-29. Fourth, from what Scripture affirms of God's vindicative justice, verses 30-31.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." The apostle proceeds to confirm the sentence passed upon the apostate Christian in Hebrews 10:26-27, by an appeal to God's awful, but righteous, justice in the past. If the despiser of the Mosaic law was dealt with so unsparingly, how much more severe must be the punishment meted out to those who scorn the authority of the Gospel! The Greek word for "despise" means to utterly reject a thing, to set aside or cast it off, to treat it with contempt. The one, who thus flouted the divine legislation through Moses, was he who renounced its authority, and determinately and obstinately refused to comply with its requirements. Such a one suffered the capital punishment. Probably such passages as Deuteronomy 13:6-9 and 17:2-7 were before the apostle's mind.

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" (Heb 10:29). The apostle's inspired logic here is the very reverse of that which obtains in the corrupt theology of present-day Christendom. The popular idea in these degenerate times is that, under the Gospel regime (or "dispensation of grace"), God has acted, is acting, and will act much more mildly with transgressors, than He did under the Mosaic economy. The very opposite is the truth. No judgment from heaven one-half as severe, as that which overtook Jerusalem in A.D. 70, is recorded in Scripture from Exodus 19 to Malachi 4! Nor is there anything in God's dealings with Israel, during Old Testament times, which can begin to compare with the awful severity of His "wrath" as depicted in the book of Revelation! Every despiser of the *Lordship* of Christ shall yet discover that a far hotter place has been reserved for him in hell, than what will be the portion of lawless rebels who lived under the old covenant.

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" There are degrees of heinousness in sinning (Joh 19:11), and so there are degrees in the punishment of their perpetrators (Luk 12:47-48). Here, this solemn truth is presented in the interrogative form (cf. Heb 2:3) so as to search the conscience of each reader. If I have been favoured with a knowledge of the Gospel (denied to half the human race), if I have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit (which is more than multitudes of Romanists are), if I profess to have received Christ as my Saviour and have praised Him for His redeeming grace—what punishment can fitly meet my crimes if I now despise His lordship, flout His authority, break His commandments, walk with His enemies, and go on sinning presumptuously, till I end by committing the "great transgression"?

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb 10:28-29). Instead of contenting himself with a general declaration of the equity of God's dealings with apostates, the apostle here adduces additional particulars of the crime before him. In this verse, we have brought before us the awful aggravations of the sin of apostasy,

showing what is implied and involved in this unpardonable transgression. Three things are specified, at each of which we shall briefly glance.

First, “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God.” Once more, we would call attention to the varied manner in which the Holy Spirit refers to the Saviour in this epistle. Here, it is not “Jesus,” or “Christ,” but the “Son of God,” and that, because His purpose is to emphasize the infinite dignity of the One slighted. It is not a mere man, nor even an angel, but none less than the second Person of the holy Trinity who is so grievously insulted! Backsliding and apostasy is a treating of the Lord of glory with the utmost contempt. What could be worse? The figure here employed is very expressive and solemn. To “tread under foot” is the basest use to which a thing can be put. It signifies a scornful spurning of an object as a thing that is worthless, and is applied to swine trampling pearls under their feet (Mat 7:6). O my reader, when we deliberately ignore the claims of God’s Son and despise His commandments, we are treading His authority beneath our feet.

Second, “and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing.” Here, as John Owen rightly pointed out, “The second aggravation of the sin spoken of is its opposition to the *office* of Christ, especially His priestly office, and the sacrifice He offered thereby, called here ‘the blood of the covenant.’” In our exposition of chapter 9, we sought to show in what sense the blood of Christ was “the blood of the covenant.” It was that whereby the new covenant and testament were confirmed and made effectual unto all its grace, to those who believe, being the foundation of all God’s actings toward Christ in His resurrection, exaltation, and intercession (cf. Heb 13:20). Now, the backslider and apostate does, by his conduct, treat that precious blood as though it were a worthless thing. There are many degrees of this frightful sin. But, O my reader, whenever we give rein to our lusts and are not constrained by the love of Christ to render Him that devotion and obedience which are His due, we are, in fact, despising the blood of the covenant.

Third, “and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.” (Heb 10:29). This is the greatest aggravation of all. “Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him” (Luk 12:10). It is by the Spirit the Christian was regenerated, enlightened, convicted, and brought to Christ. It is by the Spirit the Christian is led and fed, taught and sanctified. What reverence is due Him as a divine Person! What gratitude as a divine benefactor! How dreadful the sin, then, which treats Him with insolence, which scorns to attend unto His winsome voice, which despises His gracious entreaties! While the grossest form of the sin here referred to is malignantly imputing unto Satan the works of the Spirit, yet there are milder degrees of it. O my reader, let us earnestly endeavor to keep from grieving Him (Eph 4:30), and more completely yield ourselves to be “led” (Rom 8:14) by Him along the highway of practical holiness.

Saith the Lord Almighty, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor [in spirit] and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth* at my word” (Isa 66:2). Surely if there is a passage anywhere in Holy Writ which should cause each of us to “tremble,” it is the one now before us! Not tremble lest we *have* already committed this unpardonable sin, for they who have done so are beyond all exercise of conscience, being given up by God to hardness of heart. No, but tremble *lest* we should begin a course of backsliding, which, if unarrested,

would certainly lead thereto. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Co 10:12). O my reader, make this your daily prayer, "Hold up my goings in *thy* paths, that my footsteps slip not" (Psa 17:5).

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the LORD. And again, The Lord shall judge His people" (Heb 10: 30) In this verse, further confirmation is supplied of the awful severity and the absolute certainty of the punishment of apostates. Once more, we have an example of a most important principle which regulated the apostle in his ministry, both oral and written. In Hebrews 10:28-29, he had given a specimen of spiritual reasoning drawing a clear and logical inference from the less to the greater. Yet decisive and unanswerable as this was, he rested not his case upon it, but instead, established it by quoting from the Holy Scriptures. Let servants of God today act upon the same principle, and give a definite "Thus saith the Lord" for all they advance.

"For we know him that hath said" (Heb 10:30). Here, our attention is directed unto the divine character, what God is in Himself. Nothing behoves us more than to frequently and fully consider *who it is* with whom we have to do. Our conception of the divine character plays an important part in moulding our hearts and regulating our conduct. Therefore it is that we find the apostle, in another place, praying that the saints may be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10). It is a most profitable exercise for the soul to be often engaged in contemplating the divine attributes, pondering God's all-mighty power, ineffable holiness, unimpeachable veracity, exact justice, absolute faithfulness, and terrible severity. Christ Himself has bidden us, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat 10:28). The better God's character be known, the more we heed that exhortation of Christ's, the clearer shall we perceive that there is nothing unsuited to the holiness of God in what Scripture affirms concerning His dealings with the wicked. It is because the true nature of sin is so little viewed in the light of God's awful holiness that so many fail to recognize its *infinite* demerits.

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the LORD." The reference is to Deuteronomy 32:35, though the apostle does not quote word for word as we now have that text. Moses was there reminding of the office which God holds as the Judge of all the earth. As such, He enforces His righteous law and inflicts it's just punishment on wilful and impenitent sinners. Though, in His unsearchable wisdom, He is often pleased to forbear for a while—for He "endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22). Nevertheless, God will yet pay to every transgressor the full wages which their sins have earned. God bore long with the Antediluvians, but at the end, He destroyed them by the flood. Wondrous was His patience toward the Sodomites, but at His appointed season, He rained down fire and brimstone upon them. With amazing forbearance, He tolerates the immeasurable wickedness of the world, but the day is swiftly approaching when He will avenge Himself upon all who now so stoutly oppose Him.

"And again, The Lord shall judge his people" (Heb 10:30). A most important example is here given as a guide to teach us how Scripture is to be *applied*. The reference is to what is recorded in Deuteronomy 32:36, but there it is God's care exercised on behalf of His people, while here it is His vengeance upon their enemies. Some have caviled at the

appositeness of the apostle's quotation. Yet they should not. Each *particular* Scripture has a *general* application, and is *not* to be limited unto those first addressed. If God undertakes to protect His people, He will certainly exercise judgment on those who apostatize. He did so in the past (see 1Co 10:5), He will do so in the future (2Th 1:7-8). The rule which is established by this quotation from Deuteronomy is that all Scripture is equally applicable unto all cases of the like nature. What God says concerning those who are the enemies of His people, becomes applicable to His people *should* they break and reject His covenant.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). Here is the unescapable conclusion which must be drawn from all that has been before us. This word "fearful" ought to make every trifler with sin tremble as did Belshazzar when he saw the hand writing upon the wall. To "fall into the hands of" is a metaphor denoting the utter helplessness of the victim when captured by his enemy. The One into whose hands the apostate falls is "the living God." "A mortal man, however incensed he may be, cannot carry his vengeance beyond death; but God's power is not bounded by so narrow limits" (John Calvin, 1509-1564). No, forever and ever will God's wrath burn against the objects of His judgment. Nor will the supplications of sinners prevail upon Him. See Proverbs 1:28, Ezekiel 8:18.

By the penitent and obedient, God is loved and adored. But by the impenitent and defiant, He is to be dreaded. The wicked may now pride themselves that, in the day of judgment, they will placate God by their tears, but they will then find that, not only His justice, but His outraged mercy also calls aloud for His vengeance upon them. Men may now be beguiled by visions of a "larger hope," but in that day, they shall discover it is only another of Satan's lies. O how the "terror of the Lord" (2Co 5:11) ought to stir up God's servants to warn and persuade men before the day of grace is finally closed. And how it should make each one of us walk softly before God, sparing no pains to make our calling and election "sure." It is only as we "*add*" to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love that we have scriptural assurance that *we* shall "never fall" (2Pe 1:5-10).

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### *5. His Early Experiences*

Had we sought a topical title for this article, "The Prince of Popularity" might well have been selected. The 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Samuel closes by recounting the memorable victory of David over Goliath, the Philistine giant. The 18<sup>th</sup> chapter informs us of a number of things which formed the sequel to that notable achievement. There is much which those who are ambitious and covetous of earthly honour do well to take to heart. An accurate portrayal is given of different phases and features of human nature that is full of instruction for those who will duly ponder the same. Much is condensed into a small compass, but little imagination is required in order to obtain a vivid conception of what is there

presented. One scene after another is passed in rapid review, but amid them all, the man after God's own heart acquitted himself admirably. May the Lord enable each of us to profit from what is here recorded for our learning.

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1Sa 18:1 and cf. verses 3-4). Let us admire here the tender grace of God, and behold an illustration of a blessed principle in His dealings with us. Jonathan was the son of Saul, and therefore (ordinarily), heir apparent to the throne. But, as we have seen, David had been anointed unto that position. There was, therefore, occasion for Jonathan to look upon David as his rival, and to be filled with jealousy and hatred against him. Instead, his heart is united unto him with a tender affection. This should not be attributed to the amiability of his character, but is to be ascribed unto Him in whose hand are all our hearts and ways.

What we have just called attention to above is not sufficiently recognized and pondered in these evil days—No, not even by the people of God. There is nothing recorded of Jonathan which really shows that he was a saved man, but not a little to the contrary—particularly in the closing scenes of his life. When, then, the heart of a man of the world is drawn out to a saint, when he shows kindness unto him, we should always discern the secret workings of God's power, graciously exercised for us. He, who employed ravens to feed His servant Elijah (1Ki 17), often moves the hearts and minds of unregenerate people to be kind toward His children. It was the Lord who gave Joseph “favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21), the Israelites “favour in the sight of the Egyptians” (Exo 3:21) at the time of their exodus, and Esther in the sight of King Ahasuerus (Est 5:2). It is so still, and we only honour God when we perceive and own this and praise Him for it.

David's finding favour in the eyes of Jonathan was the more noteworthy, in that, the envy and enmity of Saul was soon stirred against him. What a mercy from God was it, then, for David to have a true friend in his enemy's household! The value of it will come before us later. It was by this means that our hero received warning and his safety was promoted. In like manner, there are few of God's children unto whom He does not, in critical seasons, raise up those who are kindly disposed toward them, and who in various ways help and succour them. Thus it has been in the life of the writer, and we, doubt not, with many of our readers also. Let us admire the Lord's goodness and adore His faithfulness in thus giving us the sympathy and assistance of unsaved friends in a hostile world.

“And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house” (1Sa 18:2). The purpose of God concerning David was beginning to ripen. First, He had so over-ruled things that Saul had sent for him to attend the king occasionally in his fits of melancholia. But now, David was made a permanent member of the court. This was but fitting, in view of the promise which had been made to him by the king before he encountered Goliath, that if victorious, Saul's daughter should be given to him to wife (1Sa 17:25). Thus was David being fitted for his royal duties. It is blessed when we are able to realize that each providential change in our lives is another step toward the accomplishing of the divine counsels concerning us.

“And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and

also in the sight of Saul's servants" (1Sa 18:5). Beautiful is it to behold here the humility and fidelity of the one upon whom the anointing oil already rested. Diligently had he fulfilled his trust in the sheepfold at Bethlehem, dutifully did he now carry out the orders of the king. Let this be duly laid to heart by any who are tempted to chafe under the situation which they now occupy. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecc 9:10), defines the duty of each one of us. The teaching of the New Testament is, of course, the same. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit" (Rom 12:11). Whatever position you occupy, dear reader, no matter how humble or distasteful, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col 3:23).

"And behave himself wisely" (1Sam 18:14). How very few do so! How many have, through injudicious conduct, not only hindered their spiritual progress, but ruined their earthly prospects. Such a word as the one now before us needs to be turned into prayer—believing, fervent, persevering. Especially is that counsel timely unto the young. We need to ask God to enable us to carry ourselves wisely in every situation in which He has placed us, that we may redeem the time, be on our guard against temptations, and perform each duty to the very best of our ability. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mat 10:16), does not mean be compromisers and temporisers, tricky and deceitful, but take into consideration the fickleness of human nature and trust none but God. In David's behaving himself "wisely," he points again unto Him of whom God said, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently" (Isa 52:13).

Saul now set David "over the men of war." Though not made commander-in-chief, some high military office was given him, possibly over the king's bodyguard. This was a further step toward the equipping of David for his life's work. There was much fighting ahead of him, powerful enemies of Israel which had to be conquered. Thus was God making all things "work together" for his good. What a change from the obscurity and peace of pastoral life to becoming a courtier and soldier. "And he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (1Sa 18:5). God gave their future ruler favour in the eyes both of the common people and of the court. How this reminds us of what is recorded of the Antitype, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luk 2:52).

"And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1Sa 18:6-7) How this incident served to make manifest the low spiritual state into which the nation of Israel had now sunk. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34). The language we employ is a sure index to the condition of our souls. "They are *of* the world: therefore *speak* they of the world" (1Jo 4:5). It is indeed distressing, yet ought not to be surprising, that so very, very few professing Christians, in their general conversation with each other, "minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph 4:29). Not surprising, because the great majority of them are strangers to the power of godliness.

The language used by the women of Israel, when celebrating the death of Goliath and the defeating of the Philistines, gave plain indication that their hearts and minds were occupied only with the human victors. "*God* is not in all his thoughts" (Psa 10:4). Alas that

this is so often the case today. We are living in an age of hero worship, and Christendom itself is infected by this evil spirit. Man is eulogized and magnified on every hand, not only out in the world, but even in the so-called churches, Bible conferences, and religious periodicals—seen in the advertising of the speakers, the printing of the photos, and the toadying to them. O how little hiding behind the cross, how little self-effacement there is today. “Cease ye from *man*” (Isa 2:22) needs to be placed in large letters over the platforms of all the big religious gatherings in this man-deifying age. No wonder the Holy Spirit is “grieved” and “quenched,” yet where are the voices being raised in faithful protest?

“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1Sa 18:7). What a sad contrast was this from what we find recorded in Exodus 15! A far greater overthrow of the enemy was witnessed by Israel at the Red Sea than what had just taken place in the valley of Elah (1Sa 17:19). Yet we do not find the mothers of these women of Israel magnifying Moses and singing *his* praises. Instead, we hear Miriam saying to her sisters, “Sing ye to the LORD, for *he* hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (Exo 15:21). JEHOVAH was there given His true place, the victory being ascribed to Him and not to the human instruments. See to it, dear reader, that, no matter what the common and evil custom be to the contrary, you give *all* the glory to Him unto whom alone it rightfully belongs.

“And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?” (1Sa 18:8). The song of the women was not only dishonouring to God, but was impolitic as well. As we saw in verse 5, David “behaved himself *wisely*,” but the conduct of Israel’s daughters was in sharp contrast therefrom. The honouring of David above Saul was more than the king’s proud heart could endure. The activity of the “flesh” in the women acted upon the “flesh” in him. Unable to rejoice in what God had wrought through another, Saul was envious when he heard the superior praises of David being sung. He could not tolerate the thought of being second.

Perhaps someone may be inclined to raise the question, “Why did not God restrain those women from exalting David in song above Saul (as He could easily have done), and thus prevented the rising of the king’s jealousy?” Several answers may be returned to this query. It subserved God’s purpose and promoted the spiritual good of David. God often withholds His curbing hand in order that it may the better appear what is in fallen man and unregenerate man. Were He not to do so, the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil would not be so evident. Moreover, David was being flattered, and flattery is ever a dangerous thing. Therefore, does God often wisely and mercifully check our proud hearts from being unduly elated thereby, by causing some to think and speak evil of us.

“For every great and good work a man must expect to be envied by his neighbor. No distinction or pre-eminence can be so unexceptionably obtained, but it will expose the possessor to slander and malice, and perhaps to the most fatal consequences. But such trials are very *useful* to those who love God. They serve as a counterpoise to the honour put upon them, and check the growth of pride and attachment to the world. They exercise



them to faith, patience, meekness, and communion with God. They give them a fair opportunity of exemplifying the amiable nature and tendency of true godliness, by acting with wisdom and propriety in the most difficult circumstances. They make way for increasing experience of the Lord's faithfulness, in restraining their enemies, raising them up friends, and affording them His gracious protection. And they both prepare them for those stations in which they are to be employed and open their way to them. For, in due time, modest merit will shine forth with double lustre" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

Ere passing on, let it be remembered that each detail of this chapter, and everything in the Old Testament Scriptures, is "written for our learning" (Rom 15:4). Especially does it need to be emphasized, for the benefit of the young, that lavish commendations from those who admire and love us, in such a world as this, often prove a real injury. And in all cases, everything should be avoided which can excite envy and opposition—except the performance of our duty to God and man. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you" (Luk 6:26). During the twelve years he was in the pastorate, the writer deemed it expedient to retire into the vestry as soon as the service was over. The "flesh" loves to hear the eulogies of the people, but they are not conducive to humility. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? *seek them not*" (Jer 45:5).

"And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (1Sa 18:9). Perceiving that David was looked upon favourably by the people (1Sa 18:5), jealous of the praise which was accorded him (1Sa 18:7), fearful that he might soon lose the kingdom (1Sa 18:8), Saul now regarded the slayer of Goliath with a malignant eye. Instead of looking upon David with esteem and gratitude, as he should have done because of this gallant behaviour, he jealously observed his ways and actions, biding his time to do him injury. What a solemn example does this provide of the inconstancy of poor human nature! Only a little before, Saul had "loved him greatly" (1Sa 16:21), and now he hated him. Beware, my reader, of the fickleness of the human heart. There is only One who can truthfully say, "I change not" (Mal 3:6).

If David was counting upon the stability of Saul's affection for him, if he concluded that his military prowess had established him in the king's favour, he was now to meet with a rude awakening. Instead of gratitude, there was cruel envy. Instead of kindly treatment, his very life was sought. And this, too, is recorded for our instruction. The Holy Scriptures not only unveil to us the attributes of God, but they also reveal to us the character of man. Fallen human nature is faithfully depicted as it actually is. The more attentively God's Word be pondered and its teachings and principles absorbed, the better will we be fortified against many a bitter disappointment. There is no excuse for any of us being deceived by people. If we took to heart the solemn warnings which the Bible furnishes, we should be far more upon our guard, and would heed such exhortations as are found in Psalms 146:3, Proverbs 17:18, Jeremiah 9:4, 17:5, and Micah 7:5.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice" (1Sa 18:10-11). How swiftly troubles follow on the heels of triumphs! What a contrast between hearing the acclaiming songs of the women and dodging a murderous weapon! And yet,

how true to life! Well, then, does each of us need to seek grace that we may learn to hold everything down here with a light hand. Rightly did one of the Puritans counsel, "Build not thy nest in any earthly tree, for the whole forest is doomed to destruction." It is only as the heart is set upon things above that we find an object which will never disappoint nor pall.

"The evil spirit came from God upon Saul." Yes, the wicked as well as the righteous, evil spirits as well as holy angels, are under the absolute and immediate control of God, cf. Judges 9:23. But let us not miss the solemn *connection* between what is recorded in verse 9 and in verse 10. When we indulge jealousy and hatred, we give place to the devil (Eph 4:26-27). "And he prophesied." All prophesyings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, that is why we need to heed 1 John 4:1. Observe the enemy's subtlety. No doubt Saul's prophesying was designed to take David off his guard. He would least expect an attempt on his life at such a time. Blessed is it to note that, after avoiding the deadly weapon cast at him, David did not pick it up and hurl it at Saul. Instead, he quietly withdrew from his presence. May like grace be granted unto both writer and reader when tempted to retaliate upon those who wrong us.

## SAVING FAITH

### *3. Its Difficulty*

Some of our readers will probably be surprised to hear about the *difficulty* of saving faith. On almost every side today, it is being taught, even by men styled orthodox and "fundamentalists," that getting saved is an exceedingly simple affair. So long as a person believes John 3:16 and "rests on it," or "accepts Christ as his personal Saviour," that is *all* that is needed. It is often said that there is nothing left for the sinner to do but direct his faith toward the right object. Just as a man trusts his bank or a wife, her husband, let him exercise the same faculty of faith and trust in Christ. So widely has this idea been received, that for any one now to condemn it, is to court being branded as a heretic. Notwithstanding, the writer here unhesitatingly denounces it as a most God-insulting lie of the devil. A natural faith is sufficient for trusting a human object, but a supernatural faith is required to savingly trust in a divine object.

While observing the methods employed by present-day "evangelists" and "personal workers," we are made to wonder what place the Holy Spirit has in their thoughts. Certainly, they entertain the most degrading conception of that miracle of grace which He performs, when He moves a human heart to truly surrender unto the Lord Jesus. Alas, in these degenerate times, few have any idea that saving faith *is* a miraculous thing. Instead, it is now almost universally supposed that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the human will, which any man is capable of performing. All that is needed is to bring before a sinner a few verses of Scripture which describe his lost condition, one or two which contain the word "believe," and then a little persuasion for him to "accept Christ," and the thing is done. And the awful thing is that so very, very few see anything wrong with this.

Blind to the fact that such a process is only the devil's drug to lull thousands into a false peace.

So many have been argued into a believing that they are saved! In reality, their "faith" sprang from nothing better than a superficial process of logic. Some "personal worker" addresses a man, who has no concern whatever for the glory of God and no realization of his terrible hostility against Him. Anxious to "win another soul to Christ," he pulls out his New Testament and reads to him 1 Timothy 1:15. The worker says, "You are a sinner," and this man, assenting, he is at once informed, then that verse includes "*You*." Next, John 3:16 is read and the question is asked, "Who does the word 'whosoever' include?" The question is repeated until the poor victim answers, "You, me, everybody." Then, he is asked, "Will you believe it? Believe that God loves you, that Christ died for you?" If the answer is, "Yes," he is at once assured that he is now saved. Ah, my reader, if *this* is how you were "saved," then it was with "*enticing* words of man's wisdom" and *your* "faith" stands only "in the wisdom of men" (1Co 2:4-5), and not in the power of God!

Multitudes seem to think that it is about as easy for a sinner to purify his heart (Jam 4:8) as it is to wash his hands—to admit the searching and flesh-withering light of divine truth into the soul, as the morning sun into his room by pulling up the blinds—to turn from idols to God, from the world to Christ, from sin to holiness, as it is to turn a ship right round by the help of her helm. O my reader, be not deceived on this vital matter. To mortify the lusts of the flesh, to be crucified unto the world, to overcome the devil, to die daily unto sin and live unto righteousness, to be meek and lowly in heart, trustful and obedient, pious and patient, faithful and uncompromising, loving and gentle, in a word, to be a Christian, *to be Christlike*, is a task far, far beyond the poor resources of fallen human nature.

It is because a generation has arisen which is ignorant of the *real nature* of saving faith, that they deem it such a simple thing. It is because so very few have any scriptural conception of *the character* of God's great salvation that the delusions referred to above are so widely received. It is because so very few realize *what* they need saving from, that the popular "evangel" (?) of the hour is so eagerly accepted. Once it is seen that saving faith consists of very much more than believing that "Christ died for me," that it involves and entails the complete surrender of my heart and life to His government, fewer will imagine that they possess it. Once it is seen that God's salvation is not only a legal, but also an experimental thing, that it not only justifies, but regenerates and sanctifies, fewer will suppose they are its participants. Once it is seen that Christ came here to save His people not only from hell, but from sin, from self-will and self-pleasing, then fewer will desire His salvation.

The Lord Jesus did not teach that saving faith was a simple matter. Far from it! Instead of declaring that the saving of the soul was an easy thing, which many would participate in, He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat 7:14). The only path which leads to heaven is a hard and laborious one. "We must through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). An entrance into that path calls for the utmost endeavours of soul. "*Strive to* enter in at the strait gate" (Luk 13:24).

After the young ruler had departed from Christ, sorrowing, the Lord turned to His disciples and said, "How *hard* is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a *rich* man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mar 10:24-25). What place is given to such a passage as this in the theology (if "theology" it is fit to be called) which is being taught in the "Bible Institutes" to those seeking to qualify for evangelistic and personal work? None at all! According to their views, it is just as easy for a millionaire to be saved as it is for a pauper, since *all* that either has to do is "rest on the finished work of Christ." But those who are wallowing in wealth think not of God. "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hos 13:6)!

When the disciples heard these words of Christ's, "They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?" (Mar 10:26). Had our moderns heard them, they had soon set their fears at rest, and assured them that anybody and everybody could be saved, if they believed on the Lord Jesus. But not so did Christ reassure them. Instead, He immediately added, "With men it is *impossible*, but not with God" (Mar 10:27). Of himself, the fallen sinner can no more repent evangelically, believe in Christ savingly, come to Him effectually, than he can create a world. "With men it is impossible" rules out of court all special pleading for the power of man's will. Nothing but a *miracle of grace* can lead to the saving of any sinner.

And *why* is it "impossible" for the natural man to exercise saving faith? Let the answer be drawn from the case of this young ruler. He departed from Christ sorrowing, "for he had great possessions." He was wrapped up in them. They were his idols. His heart was chained to the things of earth. The demands of Christ were too exacting. To part with all and follow Him was more than flesh and blood could endure. Reader, what are *your* idols? To him, the Lord said, "One thing thou lackest." What was it? A yielding to the imperative requirements of Christ, a heart surrendered to God. When the soul is stuffed with the dregs of earth, there is no room for the impressions of heaven. When a man is satisfied with carnal riches, he has no desire for spiritual riches.

The same sad truth is brought out again in Christ's parable of the "great supper." The feast of divine grace is spread, and through the Gospel, a general call is given for men to come and partake of it. And what is the response? This—"They all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luk 14:18). And why should they? Because they were more interested in other things. Their hearts were set upon land (Luk 14:18), oxen (Luk 14:19), domestic comforts (Luk 14:20). People are willing to "accept Christ" on their own terms, but not on His. What His terms *are* is made known in the same chapter—giving Him the supreme place in our affections (Luk 14:26), the crucifixion of self (Luk 14:27), the abandonment of every idol (Luk 14:33). Therefore did He ask, "Which of you, intending to build a tower [figure of a hard task, of setting the affections on things *above*] sitteth not down first, and *counteth the cost*" (Luk 14:28).

"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (Joh 5:44). Do these words picture the exercise of saving faith as the simple matter which so many deem it? The word, "honour," here signifies approbation or praise. While those Jews were making it their chief aim to win and hold the good opinion of each other, and were indifferent to the approval of God, it was impossible

that they should come to Christ. It is the same now. "Whosoever therefore will be [desires and is determined to be] a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). To come to Christ effectually, to believe on Him savingly, involves the turning our backs upon the world, alienating ourselves from the esteem of our godless (or religious) fellows, and identifying ourselves with the despised and rejected One. It involves bowing to His yoke, surrendering to His Lordship, and living henceforth for *His* glory. And *that* is no small task.

"*Labour* not for the meat which perisheth, but *for* that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (Joh 6:27). Does this language imply that the obtaining of eternal life is a simple matter? It does not! Far from it! It denotes that a man must be in deadly earnest, subordinating all other interests in his quest for it, and be prepared to put forth strenuous endeavors and overcome formidable difficulties. Then, does this verse teach salvation by works, by self-efforts? No, and Yes. No, in the sense that anything we do can *merit* salvation—eternal life is a "gift." But, Yes, in the sense that whole-hearted seeking after salvation and a diligent use of the prescribed means of grace are demanded of us. Nowhere in Scripture is there any promise to the dilatory. Compare Hebrews 4:11.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44). Plainly does this language give the lie to the popular theory of the day that it lies within the power of man's will to be saved any time he chooses to be. Flatly does this verse contradict the flesh-pleasing and creature-honouring idea that anyone can receive Christ as his Saviour the moment he decides to do so. The reason why the natural man cannot come to Christ, till the Father "draw" him, is because he is the bondsman of sin (Joh 8:34), serving divers lusts (Ti 3:3), the captive of the devil (2Ti 2:26). Almighty power must break his chains and open the prison doors (Luk 4:18) ere he *can* come to Christ. Can one who loves darkness and hates the light reverse the process? No, no more than a man who has a diseased foot or poisoned hand can heal it by an effort of will. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23).

"And if the righteous with difficulty is saved, the ungodly and sinner where shall appear?" (1Pe 4:18, Bagster's Interlinear). Matthew Henry (1662-1714) said, "It is as much as the best can do to secure the salvation of their souls. There are so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties to be overcome; so many sins to be mortified; the gate is so strait, and the way so narrow, that it is as much as the righteous can do to be saved. Let the absolute necessity of salvation balance the difficulty of it. Consider your difficulties are greatest at first. God offers His grace and help. The contest will not last long. Be but faithful to the death and God will give you the crown of life, Revelation 2:10." So also John Lillie (1812-1867), "After all that God has done by sending His Son, and the Son, by sending the Holy Spirit, it is only with difficulty, exceeding difficulty, that the work of saving the righteous advances to its consummation. The entrance into the kingdom lies through much tribulation—through fightings without and fears within—through the world's seductions and its frowns—through the utter weakness and continual failures of the flesh, and the many fiery darts of Satan."

Here then are the reasons why saving faith is so difficult to put forth. 1. By nature, men are entirely ignorant of its real character, and therefore are easily deceived by Satan's plausible substitutes for it. But even when they are scripturally informed thereon, either they sorrowfully turn their backs on Christ, as did the rich young ruler when he learned His terms of discipleship, or they hypocritically profess when they do not possess. 2. The power of self-love reigns supreme within and to *deny* self is too great a demand upon the unregenerate. 3. The love of the world and the approbation of their friends stands in the way of a complete surrender to Christ. 4. The demands of God that He should be loved with *all* the heart and that we should be "holy in all manner of conversation" (1Pe 1:15) repels the carnal. 5. Bearing the reproach of Christ, being hated by the religious world (Joh 15:18), suffering persecution for righteousness' sake, is something which mere flesh and blood shrinks from. 6. The humbling of ourselves before God, penitently confessing *all* our self-will, is something which an unbroken heart revolts against. 7. To fight the good fight of faith (1Ti 6:12) and overcome the devil (1Jo 2:13) is too arduous an undertaking for those who love their own ease.

Multitudes desire to be saved from hell (the natural instinct of *self*-preservation) who are quite unwilling to be saved from *sin*. Yea, there are tens of thousands who have been deluded into thinking that they have "accepted Christ as their Saviour," whose lives show plainly that they *reject* Him as their Lord. For a sinner to obtain the pardon of God, he must "*forsake* his way" (Isa 55:7). No man can turn *to* God, until he turns *from* idols (1Th 1:9). Thus insisted the Lord Jesus, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luk 14:33).

The terrible thing is that so many preachers today, under the pretense of magnifying the grace of God, have represented Christ as the Minister of *sin*, as One who has, through His atoning sacrifice, procured an indulgence for men to continue gratifying their fleshly and worldly lusts. Providing a man professes to believe in the virgin birth and vicarious death of Christ, and claims to be resting upon Him alone for salvation, he may pass for a real Christian almost anywhere today, even though his daily life may be no different from that of the moral worldling who makes no profession at all. The devil is chloroforming thousands into hell by this very delusion. The Lord Jesus asks, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?" (Luk 6:46), and insists "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mat 7:21).

The hardest task before most of us is not to learn, but to unlearn. Many of God's own children have drunk so deeply of the sweetened poison of Satan, that it is by no means easy to get it out of their systems. And while it remains in them, it stupefies their understanding. So much is this the case that, the first time one of them reads an article like this, it is apt to strike them as an open attack upon the sufficiency of Christ's finished work, as though we were here teaching that the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb needed to be plussed by something from the creature. Not so. Nothing but the merits of Immanuel can ever give any sinner title to stand before the ineffably holy God. But what we are now contending for is *when* does God impute to any sinner the righteousness of Christ? Certainly not while he is opposed to Him.

Moreover, we do not honour the work of Christ until we correctly define *what* that work was designed to effect. The Lord of glory did not come here and die to procure the pardon of our sins and the taking us to heaven while our hearts still remain cleaving to the earth. No, He came here to prepare a way to heaven (Joh 10:4; 14:4; Heb 10:20-22; 1Pe 2:21), to call men into that way, that by His precepts and promises, His example and Spirit, He might form and fashion their souls to that glorious state, and make them willing to abandon all things for it. He lived and died so that His Spirit should come and quicken dead sinners into newness of life, make them new creatures in Himself, and cause them to sojourn in this world as those who are not of it, as those whose hearts have already departed from it. Christ did not come here to render a change of heart, repentance, faith, personal holiness, the loving of God supremely, and obeying Him unreservedly, as unnecessary, or salvation as possible *without* them. How passing strange that any suppose He did!

Ah, my reader, it becomes a searching test for each of our hearts to honestly face the question, "Is *this* what I really long for?" As John Bunyan (1628-1688) asked (in his, "The Jerusalem Sinner Saved"), "What are thy desires? Wouldest thou be saved? Wouldest thou be saved with a *thorough* salvation? Wouldest thou be saved from guilt, and from filth too? Wouldest thou be the *servant* of thy Saviour? Art thou indeed weary of the service of thy old master, the devil, sin, and the world? And have these desires put thy soul to flight? Doest thou fly to Him that is a Saviour from the wrath to come, for life? If these be thy desires, and if they be unfeigned, fear not."

"Many people think that when we preach salvation, we mean salvation from going to hell. We do mean that, but we mean a great deal more. We preach salvation from *sin*. We say that Christ is able to save a man and we mean by that that He is able to save him from sin and to make him holy, to make him a new man. No person has any right to say, 'I am saved,' while he continues in sin as he did before. How can you be saved from sin while you are living in it? A man that is drowning cannot say he is saved from the water while he is sinking in it. A man that is frost-bitten cannot say, with any truth, that he is saved from the cold while he stiffened in the wintry blast. No, man, Christ did not come to save thee *in* thy sins, but to save thee *from* thy sins. Not to make the disease so that it should not kill thee, but to let it remain in itself mortal, and nevertheless, to remove it from thee and thee from it. Christ Jesus came, then, to heal us from the plague of sin, to touch us with His hand and say, 'I will, be thou clean'" (Mat 8:3) (Charles H. Spurgeon, on Matthew 9:12, 1834-1892).

They, who do not yearn after holiness of heart and righteousness of life, are only deceiving themselves when they suppose they desire to be saved by Christ. The plain fact is all that is wanted by so many today is merely a soothing portion for their conscience, which will enable them to go on comfortably in a course of self-pleasing, which will permit them to continue their worldly ways without the fear of eternal punishment. Human nature is the same the world over. That wretched instinct which causes multitudes to believe that the paying a papist priest a few dollars procures forgiveness of all their past sins, and an "indulgence" for future ones, moves other multitudes to greedily devour the lie that, with an unbroken and impenitent heart, by a mere act of the will, they may "believe in

Christ,” and thereby obtain not only God’s pardon for past sins, but an “eternal security,” no matter what they do or do not do in the future.

O my reader, be not deceived. God frees none from condemnation but those “which are *in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1), and “If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*: old things are [*not* “ought to be”] passed away; behold, *all things are* become new” (2Co 5:17). Saving faith makes a sinner come to Christ with a real soul-thirst, that he may drink of the living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (Joh 7:38-39). To love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to pray for them that spitefully use us, is very far from being easy. Yet *this* is only one part of the task which Christ assigns unto those who would be *His* disciples. *He* acted thus, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. And *His* “salvation,” in its *present* application, consists of a revealing to our hearts the imperative need for our measuring up to His high and holy standard, with a realization of our own utter powerlessness so to do, and a creating within us an intense hunger and thirst after such personal righteousness, and a daily turning unto Him in humble and trustful supplication for needed grace and strength.

## RECEIVING CHRIST

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Joh 1:11-12). This implies great and weighty things.

1. It implies and necessarily includes *the right understanding* of gospel terms. These must be known, pondered, and duly considered before the will can savingly open, in an act of consent, to Christ’s offer. I desire this may be specially observed, because multitudes are mistaken about this thing. He that does not consider, does not consent. You must exercise your understandings upon the terms and articles of Christianity, or else your consent is rash, blindfold, and unstable. This, in Luke 14:31, is called, “consulting.” The consent of faith is the result of previous consultations and debates in the mind. The soul that comes to Christ must take up religion in his most sedate and serious thoughts. Turn both sides of it, the dark as well as the bright side of religion, to the eye of the mind. Balance all the losses as well as gains. If I open to Christ, this I shall gain, but that I must lose. I cannot separate Christ from sufferings. Christ will separate me from me sins. If I seek Him, I must let them go, if I profess Christ. Providence will, one time or other, bring me to this dilemma. Either Christ or earthly comforts must go. It is necessary, therefore, that I now propound to myself what providence may, one time or other, propound to me.

He hath set down His terms in Matthew 16:24, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” This self-denial deserves serious consideration, for Christ requires that I give up my life, my liberty, my estate, my relations, and also my own righteousness, which is as hard to be parted with as any of the former. I must take up my cross and I must follow Christ whithersoever He goes. I know not what religion may cost me before I die. All this it has cost others, and there is no bringing down



Christ's terms lower than He has laid them. I must come up to them. They will not come down to me. If I like them not, as Christ has left them, the treating between Him and me is ended. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Mat 10:37-38). Where, by "worthiness," we are not to understand the meritoriousness of these acts, but the necessary qualifications of the will, and the due preparation of one coming to Christ. These previous consultations and debates in the mind prepare the will to make a serious and well-advised choice of Christ. And for want of this, there are such swarms of hypocrites and apostates in the world.

2. It implies *such a sense of misery in us*, and of the necessity and excellency of Christ, as determines the will to the choice of Him, notwithstanding all the difficulties which have fallen or commonly fall under consideration in the mind. When the soul sees that, in Christ which preponderates over all sufferings, all losses, and reproaches, and then determines, I will have Christ though I sacrifice all that is dear to me in the world for Him—this is to be truly willing to open to Christ. It is true, the enjoyments of this world are understood by Christians as much as other men. They have a feeling sense of the sweetness of earthly enjoyments. Their souls have as much affection to the body as other men. They understand the charming language of the world, and their dear relations in it, as well as others. Only they see a greater necessity of Christ and a greater worth in Christ, then they do in these things. You read that in the famine of Jerusalem, they gave their pleasant things for meat to relieve their souls—jewels, bracelets, gold, and silver, anything for bread (Lam 1:11). They understood the worth of those things, knew the cost of them, but parted with them to preserve life. So it is here. No earthly enjoyment, of what value so ever it be, has such an excellency in it, such an absolute necessity to us of enjoyment, as Christ has.

*Objection.* But O, saith the soul, who can do this? I am willing to have Christ and to come up to every term He has laid down in the gospel. I am willing to part with every sin and to endure any suffering for Christ. But O, I tremble to think, if it should come to a prison, a stake, to an actual separation from all the comforts and relations in this world—what shall I do for strength to go through such difficult work as this? Here is the great difficulty in the way of many souls. They find a willingness, but fear the want of strength.

*Answer.* How or where you shall find strength, to endure these things for Christ, is not the question now before you. God will take care for that and it shall be given you in that hour. So others have found who have had the same fears you have. I say, the question is not whether you are able, but whether you are heartily willing. Christ asks but your will. He will provide ability. The greatest believer in this world cannot say, "I am able to suffer this or that for Christ." But the least believer in the world must say, "I am willing, the Lord assisting me, to endure and suffer all things for His sake."

3. That which perfects the whole action is *an entire choice* of Jesus Christ *upon all the terms* prescribed by Him. The *entireness* of the choice, without halving or dividing, excepting or reserving, makes the consent full and effectual. There is a twofold consent of the will to Christ.

There is a *partial* consent which is always hypocritical, defective, and ineffectual. The hypocrite is really willing to have the pardon of Christ, the glory purchased by Him, but to part with his beloved lusts, and to give up his earthly enjoyments, his will cannot consent

to. There is a full and entire consent of the will, called a believing with *all* the heart (Act 8:37). Now, this entirety and fulness of the will's choice is that which closeth the union between Christ and the soul, and frees a man from the danger of hypocrisy. And there are three things which make the consent to the choice of Christ complete.

(1) We heartily consent to be Christ's when we give up all we are and have to Him. So that, against this choice of Christ, we look upon ourselves thenceforth as not our own, but bought with a price to glorify God in our body and soul, which are His (1Co 6:19-20). Soul and body are all that we are, and both these parts of ourselves, do now pass, by an act of our own consent, into the Redeemer's right. We are not to have the disposal of them. That belongs to Him who purchased them. You know that, in all purchases, property is altered. You did live as your own, followed your own wills and passions, were under the dominion and at the beck of every lust, but now, the case is altered. "For we ourselves also *were* sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Ti 3:3). So many lusts, so many lords! But now, we have given ourselves to Christ, no more to be swayed this way or that against His Word and the voice of your conscience. Thus, our souls and bodies are His, hallowed, dedicated to Christ, temples for God to dwell in. And thus, all other things follow of course. If I am the Lord's, then, my time, my talents, and all that I have are His.

(2) You must derive and draw all you want from Him. God hath stored up in Christ all you want, a full supply for every need, and made it all-communicable to you. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1Co 1:30). All the believer's springs are in Christ. Have I any difficult business to do that requires courage? Then I must repair to Christ, the fount of wisdom. Am I under guilt? Then I must repair to Christ for righteousness. Is my soul burdened by corruption? Then I must go to Christ for sanctification. Do I groan under troubles of soul or body, temptations or afflictions? Then I must relieve myself by the faith and hope of that complete redemption and final deliverance procured by Christ from all these. If you consent to be Christ's, you must not look for justification, partly from His righteousness and partly from your own graces and duties, but must make mention of His righteousness, even of His only (Psa 71:6). If there is but one conduit in a town, and not a drop of water to be had elsewhere, then all the inhabitants of that town repair thither for water. In the whole city of God, there is but one fount, and that is Christ. There is not a drop of righteousness, holiness, strength, or comfort to be had elsewhere. Then, we draw all from Christ, when we *live upon Him* as the new-born infant doth upon the mother's breast.

(3) Our consent to and choice of Christ is entire and full when we are ready to *deny ourselves* and part with anything we have for His sake, reckoning nothing lost to us which goes to the glory of Christ. How dear soever our liberties, estates, or lives are to us, if the Lord has need of them, we must let them go. Thus, you read, "They loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev 12:11). These three things show saving faith to be another manner of thing than the world generally understands it to be. And it is impossible for any man's will to open and receive Christ upon terms of such deep self-denial as these until there has been a conviction of sin and misery, and discovery of Christ in His glory and necessity, and the drawing power of the Spirit upon the soul.

Conviction of our sin and misery makes these terms of religion acceptable. Sinners stand debating with Christ, excepting and objecting against His terms, until the Lord has shaken, by conviction over hell, and made them see the dreadful danger they are in. And then, they cry, “What shall we do?” (Act 2:37)—Prescribe any means, impose upon us the greatest difficulties, we are willing to comply with them!

Nor will our souls ever comply with these terms of the gospel until a discovery has been made to them of Jesus Christ in His glory and necessity. When a man feels his wants, and sees a complete remedy, his will then complies readily and freely. The convinced sinner sees a full and suitable supply in Christ for all his wants, a complete Saviour, in whom there is nothing defective, but in all respects, according to the wants of the sinner’s heart.

To all this must be added the powerful drawings of the Spirit, by which the will comes to Christ, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). When these things are felt on the soul, it hears Christ’s voice, His powerful call, which breaks asunder all the bonds between a man and his earthly enjoyments. And without these things, the will is not to be persuaded to comply with the difficulties of religion. (John Flavel, 1630-1691).

## PRAYER

### *3. Praying with the Spirit and with the Understanding*

The apostle puts a clear distinction between praying with the Spirit, and praying with the Spirit and the understanding. “I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding *also*” (1Co 14:15). This distinction was occasioned through the Corinthians not observing that it was their duty to do what they did to the edification of themselves and others too, whereas they did it for their own commendation. So I judge, for many of them, having extraordinary gifts, as to speak with divers tongues, etc., therefore, they were more for those mighty gifts, than they were for the edifying of their brethren—which was the cause why Paul wrote this chapter to them—to let them understand that, though extraordinary gifts were excellent, yet to do what they did for the edification of the church, was more excellent.

It is expedient, then, that the understanding should be occupied in prayer, as well as the heart and mouth. That, which is done with understanding, is done more effectually, sensibly, and heartily. This made the apostle pray for the Colossians that God would fill them “with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1.9), and for the Ephesians that God would give them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph 1:17-18). and so for the Philippians, that their love might “abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment” (Phi 1:9).

A suitable understanding is good in everything a man undertakes, either civil or spiritual. And therefore, it must be desired by all them that would be a praying people. In my speaking of this, I shall show you what it is *to pray* "with understanding." Understanding is to be taken both for speaking in our mother-tongue and also experimentally. I pass the first, and treat only on the second. For the making of right prayers, it is to be required that there should be a good or spiritual understanding in all them who pray to God.

1. To pray with understanding is to pray as being instructed by the Spirit, in the understanding of the want of those things which the soul is to pray for. Though a man be in never so much need of pardon of sin and deliverance from wrath to come, yet if he *understand not* this, he will either not desire them at all, or else be so cold and lukewarm in his desires after them, that God will even loathe his frame of spirit in asking for them. Thus, it was with the church of Laodicea. They lacked knowledge of spiritual understanding. They knew not that they were poor, wretched, blind, and naked. The cause whereof made them, and all their services, so loathsome to Christ, that He threatens to spew them out of His mouth. Men without understanding may say the same words in prayer as others do, but if there be an understanding in the one, and none in the other, there is a mighty difference in speaking the very same words.

2. Spiritual understanding perceiveth in the heart of God a readiness and willingness to give those things to the soul that it stands in need of. David, by this, could discern the very thoughts of God towards him. And thus it was with the woman of Canaan. She did, by faith and a right understanding, recognize (beyond all the rough carriage of Christ) the tenderness and willingness in His heart, which caused her to be vehement and earnest, yea, restless, until she did enjoy the mercy she stood in need of. There is nothing will press the soul more to seek after God and cry for pardon than an understanding of His willingness to save sinners. If a man should see a pearl worth a hundred pounds lie in a ditch, yet if he understood not the value of it, he would lightly pass it by. But if he once got the knowledge of it, he would venture up to the neck for it. So it is with souls concerning the things of God. If a man once gets an understanding of the *worth* of them, then his heart, nay, the very strength of his soul, runs after them, and he will never leave crying till he have them. The two blind men in the gospel, because they did certainly know that Jesus, who was passing by them, was both able and willing to heal their infirmity, therefore, they cried. And the more they were rebuked, the more they cried.

3. The understanding being enlightened, way is made for the soul to come to God with suitable arguments, sometimes in a way of expostulation, as Jacob, sometimes in a way of supplication. Yet not in a verbal way only, but even from the heart, there is forced by the Spirit, through the understanding, such effectual arguments as moveth the heart of God. When Ephraim gets a right understanding of his own unseemly carriages towards the Lord, then he begins to bemoan himself. And in bemoaning of himself, he used such arguments with the Lord, that it affects His heart, draws out forgiveness, and makes Ephraim pleasant in His eyes through Jesus Christ our Lord. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed [or had a right understanding of

myself], I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." These be Ephraim's bemoanings of himself. At which, the Lord breaks forth into these heart-melting expressions, saying, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him" (Jer 31:18-20). Thus, you see that, as it is required to pray with the Spirit, so it is to pray with the understanding also.

To illustrate what hath been spoken by a similitude. Set the case that there come two a-begging to your door. The one is a poor, lame, wounded, and almost starved creature. The other is a healthy, lusty person. These two use the same words in their begging. The one saith, he is almost starved, so doth the other. But yet, the man that is indeed the maimed person, he speaks with more feeling and understanding of his misery than does the other, and it is discovered more by his affectionate speaking, his bemoaning himself. His pain and poverty make him speak more in a spirit of lamentation than the other, and he shall be pitied sooner than the other, by all that have the least measure of natural affection or pity. Just so is it with some. There are some, who out of custom and formality, go and pray. There are others who go in the bitterness of their spirits. The one prays out of bare notion and naked knowledge. The other hath his words forced from him by the anguish of his soul. Surely *that* is the man who God will look at, "Even him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa 66:2).

4. An understanding well enlightened is of admirable use also, both as to the matter and manner of prayer. He that hath his understanding well exercised, to discern between good and evil, and in it is placed a sense, either of the misery of man or the mercy of God, that soul hath no need of the writings of other men, to teach him by form or prayer. For as he that feels pain needs not to be taught to cry, "Oh!" even so he that hath his understanding opened by the Spirit needs not to be taught by other men's prayers as that he cannot pray without them. The present sense, feeling, and pressure that lieth upon his spirit, provoke him to groan out his requests upon the Lord. When David had the pains of hell catching hold on him, and the sorrows of hell compass him about, he needed no bishop in a surplice to learn him to say, "O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul" (Psa 116:4), or to look into a book to give him a form of prayer to use. It is the nature of the heart of sick men, in their pain, to vent itself for ease by dolorous groans and complainings to them that stand by. Thus it was with David. And thus, blessed be the Lord, it is with them that are endued with the grace of God.

5. It is necessary that there be an enlightened understanding to the end that the soul be kept in a continuation of the duty of prayer. The people of God are not ignorant how many wiles, tricks, and temptations the devil hath to make a poor soul, who is truly willing to be earnest of seeking the face of God, and to think that He is not willing to have mercy on such a one as he. "Ay," saith Satan, "thou mayest pray indeed, but thou shalt not prevail. Thou seest thine heart is hard, cold, dull, and dead. Thou dost not pray with the Spirit. Thou dost not pray in good earnest. Thy thoughts are running after other things, when thou pretendest to pray to God. Away, hypocrite, go no further. It is but in vain to strive any longer." Here now, if the soul be not well informed in its understanding, it will presently cry out, "The Lord hath forsaken me." Whereas, the soul rightly informed and enlightened,

saith, "I will seek the Lord, and wait. I will not leave off, though the Lord keep silence, and speak not one word of comfort. He loved Jacob dearly, and yet He made him wrestle before he had the blessing." Seeming delays in God are no tokens of His displeasure. He may hide His face from His dearest saints. He loves to keep His people praying and to find them ever knocking at the gate of heaven. And so the soul says, "It may be, the Lord is trying me or that He loves to hear me groaning out my condition before Him."

The woman of Canaan would not take seeming denials for real ones. She knew the Lord was gracious, and the Lord will avenge His people, though He bear long with them. The Lord hath waited longer upon me than I have waited upon Him. Thus it was with David. "I waited patiently," saith he. That is, it was long before the Lord answered me, though at the last, He inclined His ear unto me and heard my cry. And the most excellent remedy for this is an understanding well informed and enlightened. Alas! How many poor souls are there in the world that truly fear the Lord who, because they are not well informed in their understanding, are often ready to give up all for lost, upon almost every trick and temptation of Satan! The Lord pity them and help them to pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also. Much of my own experience could I here discover, when I have been in my fits of agonies of spirit, I have been strongly persuaded to leave off and to seek the Lord no longer. But being made to understand what great sinners the Lord hath had mercy on, and how large His promises were still to sinners, and that it was not the whole but the sick, not the righteous but the sinner, not the full but the empty, that He extended His grace and mercy unto. This made me, through the assistance of His Holy Spirit, to cleave to Him, to hang upon Him, and yet to cry, though for the present, He made no answer. The Lord help all His poor, tempted, and afflicted people to do the like, to continue, though it be long.

And now to answer a query or two. 1. But what would you have us poor creatures to do that know not how to pray? The Lord knows I know not either how to pray or what to pray for. *Answer:* Poor heart! Canst thou see thy misery? Hath God showed thee that thou art by nature under the curse of His law? If so, do not mistake, I know thou dost groan, and that most bitterly. I am persuaded thou canst scarcely be found doing anything in thy calling, but prayer breaketh from thy heart. Have not thy groans gone up to heaven? I know it is thus, and so also doth thine own sorrowful heart witness thy tears, forgetfulness of thy calling, etc. Is not thy heart so full of desires after the things of another world, that many times thou dost even forget the things of this world? Read Job 23:12.

2. Yea, but when I go into secret, and intend to pour out my soul before God, I can scarce say anything at all. *Answer:* (1) Ah, sweet soul, it is not thy words that God so much desires. His eye is on the brokenness of thine heart, and it is *that* which makes the very bowels of the Lord run over—"a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (2) The stopping of thy words may arise from overmuch trouble in thy heart. David was so troubled sometimes that he could not speak. But this may comfort all such sorrowful hearts as thou art, but though thou canst not, through the anguish of thy spirit, speak much, yet the Holy Spirit stirs up in thine heart groans and sighs. When thy mouth is hindered, yet the Spirit is not! Moses made heaven ring again with his prayer, yet we read not of one word that came from his mouth (Exo 14:15). If thou wouldest more fully express thyself before the Lord, study thy filthy estate, God's promises, the heart of Christ,

which thou mayest know by His blood-shedding, by the mercy He has extended to great sinners formerly, and plead thine own vileness by way of bemoaning—Christ’s blood, by way of expostulation—and in thy prayers, let the mercy He hath extended to other great sinners, together with His rich promises of grace, be much upon thy heart. Yet let me counsel thee. Take heed that thou content not thyself with words. Do not think God looks only at them, but whether thy words be few or many, let thine heart go with them and then shalt thou seek Him and find Him, when thou shalt seek Him with thy whole heart.

*Objection:* But though you have seemed to speak against any other way of praying but by the Spirit, yet here you yourself can give directions how to pray. *Answer:* We ought to prompt one another forward to prayer, though we ought not to make for each other forms of prayer. To exhort to pray with Christian direction is one thing and to make stunted forms for the tying up the Spirit of God to them is another thing. The apostle gives us no form to pray withal, yet directs to prayer. *Objection:* But if we do not use forms of prayer, how shall we teach our children to pray? *Answer:* My judgment is that men go the wrong way to learn their children to pray, and going about so soon to learn them in any set of words, as is the common use of poor creatures to do. To me, it seems a better way for people betimes to tell their children what cursed creature they are, and how they are under the wrath of God by reason of original and actual sin. Also to tell them the *nature* of God’s wrath, and the *duration* of the misery, which if they conscientiously do, they would sooner learn their children to pray than they do. The way that men learn *to pray* is by conviction for sin, and this is the way to make our sweet babes do so too. But the other way, namely, to be busy in learning children forms of prayer, before they know anything else, is the next way to make them cursed hypocrites and to puff them up with pride. Teach your children their wretched state. Tell them of hell-fire, of their sins, of damnation, and salvation. The way to escape the one, and to enjoy the other (if you know yourselves), and this will make tears run down your sweet babes’ eyes, and hearty groans flow from their hearts, and *then* also you may tell them to whom they should pray, and through whom they should pray. You may tell them also of God’s promises, and His former grace extended to sinners, according to the Word.

Ah! Poor sweet babes, the Lord open their eyes and make them holy Christians. Said David, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Psa 34:11). He did not say, “I will muzzle you up in a *form* of prayer,” but, “I will teach you the fear of the LORD,” which is to see their sad state by nature, and to be instructed in the truth of the gospel, which doth, through the Spirit, beget prayer. And every one that in truth learns it, and the more you learn them this, the more will their hearts run out to God in *prayer*. God never accounted Paul a “praying” man, until he was convinced and converted. No more will it be with anyone else.

*Objection:* But we find that the disciples desired that Christ should teach them to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And that, therefore, He taught them that form called, “The Lord’s Prayer.” *Answer:* 1. To be taught by Christ is that which, not only they, but we desire. And seeing He is not here in His person to teach us, He does so by His Word and Spirit, for the Spirit has been sent to supply His room when He went away, John 14:16, 16:7. As to that called a form, I cannot think that Christ intended it as a stunted form of prayer. First, because He Himself layeth it down diversely as may be seen by comparing

Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Had He intended it as a set form, it must have been so laid down in so many words and no more. Second, we do not find the apostles observed it as such, neither did they admonish others so to do. By those words, "Our Father," etc., Christ instructed His people what *rules* they should observe in their prayers to God: (1) that they should pray in faith, (2) to their Father in the heavens, (3) for such things as are according to His will, etc. Pray thus, or "after this manner."

*Objection:* But Christ bids prayer for the Spirit. This implies that men without the Spirit pray, notwithstanding, and are heard. *Answer:* The speech of Christ there is directed to His own. Christ, in telling them that God would give His Holy Spirit to them that asked Him, is to be understood of giving *more of* the Holy Spirit. It was the disciples who were spoken to, which had a measure of the Spirit already. Christians ought to pray for more of the Spirit, though God hath endued them with it already

*Question:* Then, would you have none pray, but those who know they are disciples of Christ? *Answer:* Yes. Let every soul that would be saved pour out itself to God, though it cannot, through temptation, conclude itself a child of God. If the grace of God be in him, it will be as natural for him to groan out his condition as it is for a sucking child to cry for the breast. Prayer is one of the first things that discovers a man to be a Christian. But yet, if it be right, it is such a prayer as this: First, to desire God in Christ for Himself, for His holiness, love, wisdom, and glory. For right prayer, as it runs on to God through Christ, so it centers in Him, and in Him alone. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire [long for and seek after] besides thee" (Psa 73:25). Second, that the soul might enjoy continually communion with Him, both here and hereafter, "For in this we do earnestly groan" (2Co 5:2), "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15). Third, right prayer is accompanied with a continual labour after that which is prayed for, "My soul waiteth for the LORD more than they that watch for the morning" (Psa 130:6). "I will rise now, and...seek him whom my soul loveth" (Song 3:2). For mark, I beseech you, that there are two things which provoke to prayer—the one is a detestation to sin and the things of this life. The other is a longing desire after communion with God, in a holy and undefiled state and inheritance. Compare but this one thing with most of the prayers that are made by men, and you shall find them but mock prayers, and the breathings of an abominable spirit. For even the most of men either pray not at all or else only endeavour to mock God and the world by so doing. Do but compare their prayers and *the course of their lives* together, and you may easily see that the thing pleaded in their prayer is the least looked after by their lives. O sad hypocrites! John Bunyan (To be continued, D.V.).

