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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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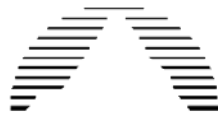
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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BRETHREN, BEWARE!

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). In the context, the apostle had brought before his readers the solemn case of the most privileged of all the generations of Israel—namely, the one which had by Jehovah’s mighty hand been delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt, and yet which *failed to enter* the land of Canaan. That generation perished in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. They were the fathers of those to whom he was here writing, their “type” (1Co 10:2), and they are held up as a warning example unto us—for “the best of saints need to be warned against the worst of evils” (John Owen). “Take heed” says the apostle—be on your guard, walk circumspectly with regard to danger. There is a great need for Christians to be constantly watchful, for they are menaced on the right hand and on the left, both from without and from within; and a careless profession is certain to end in making shipwreck of the faith.

The Christian life is not likened to lying down upon “flowery beds of ease,” but to a *warfare*; and if we gird not on our armour and be vigilant in guarding against our enemies, we shall assuredly fall a prey to them. Blind confidence and reckless presumption in a course of profession are a ruinous principle and inevitably leads to disaster. It is “with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12) that God bids them work out their own salvation. While they be left here below, they are in the Adversary’s territory, for “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19). Moreover, sin indwells them, and their corruptions are ever seeking to dominate them. God has faithfully warned us in His Word against our perils, and it is the part of wisdom to lay those warnings to heart. Only the presumptuous fool will disregard them, only the silly trifler will raise quibbles and make objections against them. If God has issued cautions, it is because we stand in real need of such.

The particular peril which our text warns against is “lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). We take it that all of our readers will allow that unbelief still remains in the Christian, but it is probable that some of them will be ready to exclaim, Surely it is not possible for a real Christian to so yield thereto that he could justly be described as one having “an evil heart of unbelief”? Others are likely to at least raise the question and ask, Is it possible for one truly born again to so give way to his native unbelief in departing from the living God that he can only be characterised as a person with “an evil heart of unbelief”? Really, it seems to us almost like asking, Is it possible; or to go further, is it likely, that a rational and well-balanced person will commit suicide? Deliberately and by premeditation, No; but by carelessness and recklessness, Yes. Many a person reputed to be sane and sensible has neglected a bad cold and died from pneumonia!

One does not have to totally abandon his profession in order to make shipwreck of the Faith—he will do so just as surely if he heedlessly disregards the warnings God has given and pursues a course of blind indifference to the consequences. Perhaps the reader replies, But one who acted thus would make it manifest he was only a dead professor. To which we answer: There are degrees of carelessness and recklessness, and who is competent to draw the line and say when fatal presumption has been reached? It may be said, *We* are not required to “draw that line,” or define what degree of recklessness would prove fatal; sufficient for us to know that God will preserve His own people from reaching that stage. Granting that, yet it must also be insisted upon that God preserves His people—not in a mechanical way, but in a moral way—by enforcing their responsibility, by giving to them, “the spirit...of a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7) and causing them to *use* the same.

The fact is that the eternal security of the saint has so often been presented in such a lopsided way that the accountability of the Christian has been implicitly—if not explicitly—repudiated. It is true, blessedly true, that God “will keep the feet of his saints” (1Sa 2:9). But how? Not by preserving them on prohibited territory, but by keeping them in the paths of righteousness; and when they wander therefrom, by restoring them thereto. It is true, blessedly true, that God delivers His people from following a course of recklessness. But *how*? Not by assuring them that all will be well in the end, no matter how negligently they conduct themselves, but by causing them to take heed to the warnings which He has given them, by moving them to avoid the perils that menace them. A small leak will not immediately sink a ship, hut it *will* eventually—if it be not stopped! The presence of unbelief in the Christian will not at once destroy him, but it would *if* he offered no resistance thereto and continuously yielded to its inclinations.

“An evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12) is a heart in which unbelief entirely predominates, a heart which is not only under the prevailing power of unbelief, but against which no contrary principle makes opposi-

tion. Such is the heart of every unregenerate person, such was the Christian's heart before he was born again; and it is against such a deterioration of his heart that he is here warned. It is this evil heart of unbelief which makes the unregenerate close their eyes and ears against the Truth. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Joh 3:19). The love of sin is the immediate cause of their unbelief. When they discover that the design of the Gospel is to part them from their sins, they will have no more to do with it. But there is also a rejection of the Truth of the Gospel *after* it has been received and professed. In many cases, those who come under the general operations of the Spirit are temporarily impressed—in some cases, deeply so—of the truth of the Gospel, are convicted and brought to acknowledge the same; yet since no supernatural principle or new nature was communicated to them, there is no lasting fruit.

Like the promising blossoms and buds on the trees in the spring, which are blown off by unfriendly winds or nipped by the frost, the salutary effects produced by an illumined understanding and an aroused conscience, sooner or later, wear off. The temptations of the world and the corruptions of their hearts either stifle their convictions, or cause them to deliberately cast them out, and the sequel is that they either avowedly or practically repudiate the Faith they have owned. They may not go so far as to openly disclaim and renounce Christianity, but they cease to maintain practical godliness. Such are those described in Titus 1:16, "They profess that they know God; but in *works* they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." The power of sin in their affections and over their wills is more influential than the light of their understandings. They are regulated neither by the rewards promised in the Gospel to obedience, nor the evils which it threatens against disobedience; but are swept downward by their own lusts. And that is the condition of great multitudes in Christendom today—they are controlled by "an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb 3:12).

Not only is there the principle of unbelief in the saint, but he is also in more or less close contact with men and women, who, though they bear the name of Christians, are nevertheless completely dominated by this evil principle—the Divine gift of faith never having been communicated to them. It is those two solemn facts which make the exhortation of our text so pertinent to us. Unless the Christian earnestly seeks grace to steadfastly resist the workings of unbelief within him and to mortify the root from which they proceed, then that antagonistic element will become uppermost and gain full control over him. And unless he is much on his guard against the pernicious influence which unregenerate church members will have upon his spiritual life, and has as little to do with them as possible, then he will soon be corrupted by them and conform to their ways. Then "take heed brethren," first, to the workings of your own hearts, and particularly to the initial oppositions made against the exercise of faith. Second, "take heed" to those you suffer yourself to become familiar with—if they do not help you toward a closer walking with God, they will inevitably draw you back unto a "departing" from Him.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

17. Ephesians 1:15-23 – Part 3

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph 1:18). In taking up this second petition in the apostle’s prayer, we shall endeavour to supply answers to the following questions: What relation does the opening clause of our verse bear to that which precedes and that which follows? Exactly what is signified by “the hope of His calling”? What is meant by a knowledge of the same? It is one thing to be familiar with the *sound* of a verse, but it is quite another to ascertain its *sense*, as there is much difference between answering these questions and *proving* them to be correct. It is just because they assume they understand the meaning of various passages that so many people never obtain a clear insight of their purport. Because the wording of a verse is simple, it does not follow that we understand its connections, or even what its terms connote. The mere fact that “hope” or “calling” signifies a certain thing in some verses gives no guarantee that it means precisely the same thing when it is used in others. We are only on safe ground when we plead ignorance and prayerfully study each verse for ourselves.

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.” Four different views have been taken of the *relation* of this clause. First, that it is to be taken absolutely and regarded as a separate petition, which appears to have been the idea entertained by our translators, as their punctuation suggests. Second, that it is in apposition to and explanatory of the verse preceding—the view adopted by Charles Hodge. Third, that it states *an effect* of the gift of “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph 1:17)—the concept of J. C. Philpot. Fourth, that it is separate from the preceding petition and introductory to this second one, which is the way in which Thomas Goodwin expounds it, and as we personally understand it. No difference in doctrine is involved, whichever view be taken. According to the Analogy of Faith, it is equally permissible to link this clause with what precedes or with what follows, or even with both. It is because we are addressing ourselves to critical students, as well as the more ordinary reader that we have penned this paragraph—for a word of explanation was required as to why we have deviated from the common course.

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) points out that the Greek for “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” is not in the dative case, but in the accusative, and should therefore be rendered, “eyes of your understanding enlightened”—the American R.V. approximating closely to that: “Having the eyes of your understanding enlightened.” Thus, instead of these words stating one of the fruits from our receiving the Spirit, it is rather a separate request for a further favour. In other words, as the apostle had first requested that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be given the saints in order to their knowledge and communion with God, so now he asks for enlightenment of their understanding that they might know the hope of His calling—that is, for more peace and joy through a clearer and firmer assurance. If we join the opening clause of verse 18 to what precedes, then it amounts to this: That a knowledge of God and an enlightened understanding—resulting from the gift of the Spirit—is but a *means* by which we may know what is the hope of His calling and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; in other words, that a knowledge of God Himself is *subordinate* to a knowledge of what the glory of Heaven consists of—and surely, that is incongruous.

As Goodwin has well pointed out, there are two things to be considered in connection with our blessedness in Heaven: “The happiness that the saints themselves shall enjoy” there, and their “communion with God, which is the cause of their happiness.” As to which is the greater of them, there can be no room for doubt: The Fountain of all blessedness infinitely surpasses our draught therefrom, no matter how abundantly we may drink. Hence, it is that the apostle began his prayer with a request for a fuller measure of the Spirit that we may be brought into a closer communion with God, and then asks for illumination of understanding that we might obtain a better apprehension and enter into a fuller enjoyment of those things which belong unto our peace. The same two things are kept distinct in Romans 5: First, he says that by faith, we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2); that is, of the glory we expect to receive from God, which expectation makes us to “glory in tribulations also” (Rom 5:3), despite the unpleasantness thereof. But blessed as that is, when he reaches the climax, he says, “not only so, but we also joy *in God*” (Rom 5:11)—in God Himself.

Two things are indispensable to vision, whether it be physical or spiritual—sight and light. A blind man is incapable of perceiving objects even when the sun is shining in midday splendour; the strongest

eyes are useless when a person is in total darkness. Now the natural man is without either spiritual sight or spiritual light. He has eyes, but they see not, perceiving no beauty in Christ that he should desire Him. He is alienated from Him who is Light, and therefore, dwells and walks in darkness. Hence, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1Co 2:14)—for he is devoid of spiritual discernment. But at regeneration, the objects of sovereign grace are brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light and are "given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20), so that they are now capacitated to discern, understand, and enjoy spiritual things. Nevertheless, because ignorance, prejudice, pride, and carnality ever tend to the beclouding of his vision, so long as he remains in this world, the Christian is in constant need of having the eyes of his understanding enlightened afresh and of praying with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psa 119:18).

As the eye is the organ of the body by which we see physical objects, so the understanding is the faculty by which the Truth is perceived. Yet, far more than a mental perception is involved in the apprehension of Truth. God's Word is very much more than a species of intellectual propositions—it is a Divine revelation, an unveiling of spiritual things, requiring a spiritual faculty to take them in, producing spiritual effects where it is received. Therefore, "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" must not be narrowed down to your minds being furnished with new ideas. In the Scriptures, "light"—when used with reference to spiritual things—includes both holiness and happiness. When the Lord Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Joh 8:12), He signified much more than "shall be intellectually illuminated." Saints are "the children of light" (1Th 5:5; Joh 12:36), because they have been renewed in the image of Him that is Light; and therefore, are they bidden to conduct themselves as such (Eph 5:8). Thus, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened signifies their being Divinely anointed, spiritualized, made "single" (Mat 6:22) and more holy.

Among the high and honourable titles of God, this is used to describe His goodness to the children of men: "He that teacheth man knowledge" (Psa 94:10); therefore David added, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psa 94:12). It is this Divine teaching of the saints that is signified by "eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph 1:18)—namely, the bestowing upon them a teachable disposition, a humble desire to be instructed of God. That teaching consists of God's enabling the mind to perceive spiritual and Divine objects, and to *so* see their importance and value as inclines the affections to love and the will to choose them. God first prepares the heart to receive His Truth (Pro 16:1) and then fills it with, "the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9). His established method is by the Word and by the Spirit, for these two always go together: The Word explaining, and the Spirit applying the Word. When the Spirit works by the Word, He makes it effectual, through His operations, to build up and perfect the saint.

But we must now inquire, What is meant by "the hope of his calling" (Eph 1:18)? which is really a double question: What is meant by the word "hope" in this passage, and what by "his calling." Before supplying answers thereto, may we remind our friends that we are seeking to furnish something more than mere generalisations or even topical articles—namely, *studies* in the Scriptures. We are not just jotting down the first thoughts which come to mind upon this verse, but desire to open its meaning, to *expound* it. Since we have spent many hours in preparing this exposition, is it too much to ask the reader to give it a patient and careful reading? The writer is conscious of his limitations and realises his efforts will come far short of what he aims at, but surely he is not to be blamed if he sets before him a higher standard than the superficial productions, which characterise the religious literature of our day. O that his own eyes may be anointed with heavenly eye-salve.

In Scripture "hope" always respects something *future*, and signifies far more than a mere wish that it *may* be realised—namely, a confident expectation that it *will* be so (Psa 16:9). In many passages, "hope" has reference to its object—that is, to the thing expected (Rom 8:25), the One looked to: "O LORD, the hope of Israel" (Jer 17:13 and compare 50:7). In other passages, it refers to the *grace* of hope—that is, the faculty by which we expect: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity" (1Co 13:13). Sometimes "hope" is put for the *assurance* we have of our personal interest in the thing hoped for. Thus, "tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed" (Rom 5:2-5)—that is, it worketh assurance or deepening of our personal confidence in God. In still other cases, it has reference to the *ground* of our expectation—"there is hope in Israel concerning this thing" (Ezr 10:2) means there are good grounds to hope for it. "Who against hope believed in hope" (Rom 4:18)—though contrary to nature,

Abraham was persuaded he had good and sufficient ground to expect God to make good His promise. The unregenerate are those “having no hope” (Eph 2:12)—they have one, but it is based on no solid foundation.

Now, it is in the last-mentioned sense we regard the word “hope” as being used in our present passage: That ye may know the *ground* on which rests your “hope of his calling,” that ye may be assured of your own personal interest therein; that ye may stand in no doubt regarding the same; that ye may be so enlightened from above as to be able to clearly perceive that ye have both part and lot therein—or in other words, that your evidence of the same may be clear and unmistakable. First, the apostle had prayed for an increased knowledge of God—that is, such spiritual sights and apprehensions of Him as led to more real and intimate fellowship with Him, which is the basic longing of every renewed soul. And what is it that he desires next to that? Is it not that which makes most for his peace and comfort—namely, to be *assured* of his own filial relation to Him? What does it avail my soul to perceive the excellency of the Divine character, unless I have Scriptural warrant to view Him as *my* God? *That* is what I need to have continually kept fresh in my heart. This, then, is the second thing which the apostle sought for these saints.

“His calling”—what is meant by that? Here is another term which is used by no means uniformly in the Scriptures. Broadly speaking, there is a twofold calling of God, or call from God: An external one, and an internal. The former is made to all who hear the Gospel: “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man” (Pro 8:4); “many be called, but few chosen” (Mat 20:16). That external call through the Scriptures is addressed to human responsibility and meets with universal rejection. “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and *no man* regarded” (Pro 1:24); “Come; for all things are now ready. And they *all* with one consent began to make excuse” (Luk 14:17, 18). But unto His elect, God gives another call: A quickening one, an inward one, an invincible one, what the theologians term, “effectual call”—“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). *This* is calling from death unto, out of darkness into God’s marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9). As the closing verses of 1 Corinthians 1 tell us, “not many” receive *this* call: It is one of distinguishing mercy and discriminating grace.

Our text then speaks of the effectual call, and it is termed, “*his* calling” (Eph 1:18), because God is the Author of it, and “*your* calling” (1Co 1:26), because saints are the recipients of it. The regenerate are “the called according to his [eternal] purpose” (Rom 8:28), because God is the Caller. Yet having said that much, we have but generalized, and the expositor must needs particularise if he is to bring out the various shades of meaning, which the same word bears in different verses. In some passages, the effectual call, which God gives His people, refers to that work of grace *itself*, as in 1 Peter 2:9; in others, it concerns more especially that *unto which* God has called them—“unto his kingdom and glory” (1Th 2:12); “unto holiness” (1Th 4:7; Rom 6:19, 22). As there seems to be nothing in our present verse which requires us to restrict the scope of the word, we shall interpret it in its double sense—that ye may be assured ye have been made partakers of God’s effectual or regenerative call; that ye may perceive the sure grounds of hope which God has called you *unto*.

Take it first for the calling itself. Paul prayed that they might have yet a better knowledge or assurance that they had been supernaturally quickened, personally called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. If the Christian measures himself impartially by the Word, he should have no difficulty on that score, but ought to be able to say humbly, yet confidently, “One thing I *know*, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (Joh 9:25). I’ll see, with a feeling sense thereof in my heart, what a heinous and filthy thing all sin is, what a depraved and loathsome creature I am by nature, what a sink of iniquity still remains within me, what a suitable and sufficient Saviour Christ is for such a wretch as me, what a lovely and desirable thing holiness is, then I must have been called into God’s marvellous light. If that regenerating call be a passing from death unto life, and I am now conscious of holy desires and endeavours to which I was previously a stranger, then I must be alive in Christ.

Or take it for that *unto which* the Christian is called—in this verse, an assured expectation: “That ye may know what is the hope of his calling.” As God has called His people unto holiness, so also He has called them to be full of hope and good cheer. As the apostle prayed in another place, “Now the God of hope *fill* you with *all* joy and peace in believing, that ye may *abound in hope*, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:13). Thus, by “his calling” we may understand, that ye may know that hope which God hath commanded you as Christians to have. When it is said in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness,” it means that He *bids* us to be holy, for the third verse of that same chapter declares, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1Th 4:3). Thus, in that pas-

sage, the “will” and “calling” of God is one and the same thing. Thus, it may also be understood here—that ye may know the hope of His (revealed) will, which He requires us *to have*.

“That ye may know” (Eph 1:18)—not that ye should be ignorant of or doubtful about. This, at once and categorically, gives the lie to one of the cardinal dogmas of Romanism. One of the decrees of the Council of Trent—the declared and indisputable “standard” of Popery—is: “If any one affirm that a regenerate and justified man is bound to believe that he is *certainly* in the number of the elect, let such an one be accursed.” From which it is crystal clear that any who seeks to undermine the legitimate assurance of Christians and who regards a state of doubt and uncertainty as one of the best evidences of an inward work of grace, is aiding and abetting the evil work of Papists. The very fact that the apostle was inspired to place on record this petition shows clearly that it is God’s will His people may have this assurance, that it is both their privilege and duty to earnestly seek it, and that an increased experience thereof should be theirs. A doubting Thomas does not honour God.

Now let us put the whole together—and from the above, the reader should be able to check how we arrive at our conclusion. It is only as, when, and in proportion as, the “eyes of your understanding” (Eph 1:18) are Divinely enlightened that we *are able* to “know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph 1:18)—know it, not by carnal presumption, nor by mental acumen, but perceive it with anointed vision. Nevertheless, if our eyes be not enlightened, the fault is entirely our own—for it is the revealed will of God that each regenerate person should have assurance that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit has given us one whole epistle to that very end: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may *know* that ye *have* eternal life” (1Jo 5:13); hence, those who would have the Christian believe that a firm and abiding assurance is not desirable (for he would be “puffed up”) are but Job’s comforters, if not false prophets, for they are contrary to the Word of Truth.

Note how emphatic it is: “The eyes of *your* understanding being enlightened; that *ye* may know.” That cannot signify less than that your *own* eyes should see what grounds of assurance the Christian really has to know that eternal life is his, that his own heart may realise the hope which God has bidden him to exercise. Not to see with some one else’s eyes, not to read through creedal spectacles, not to take any man’s say so for it, but to live by your own God-given faith and read in the light of Holy Writ your own clear evidences. As T. Goodwin well expresses it: “The apostle prays here that they may know what great, what infallible, what multitudes of ground of hope God had called them to, what grounds of assurance and evidence their souls might have that Heaven is theirs...that they might have assurance of their own interest in Heaven and see good grounds for it.” Every time I truly mourn over my sins, feel my poverty of spirit, hunger and thirst after righteousness, I have an indubitable evidence that I am among the “blessed.”

Precepts and petitions are complementary the one to the other. The precepts tell me what God requires, and therefore, what I need to most supplicate him for, that enabling grace may be given me to performing the same. The prayers intimate what it is my privilege and duty to make request for, and indirectly refill my *duty*. “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10)—unto yourself, is the Divine precept making known my duty; that “the Father of glory, may give unto you...eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph 1:17, 18) is a request that I may be enabled to successfully carry out that task. This petition tells us, “We ought to labour after and pray earnestly for a clearer insight into and a fuller acquaintance with the great objects of a Christian’s hopes and expectations” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

29. *His Young Deputy*

We regard the incident recorded in 2 Kings 9:1-10 as relating to the *missions* of Elisha, and in order to a better understanding of the same would refer the reader back to the first two articles of this series. There, we pointed out that the missions of Elijah and Elisha formed two parts of one whole, much the same as did those entrusted to Moses and Joshua. While there was indeed a striking difference between what was accomplished through and by Moses and the one who succeeded him, and while their respective missions may be considered separately, yet in the wider view, the latter should be regarded primarily as the *complement* of the former. Such was also the case with Elijah and Elisha. The analogy between Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha is not perfect in every detail, yet there is sufficient agreement in the broad outline as to enable us perceive more clearly the relation which the second sustained to the first in each of those two pairs: By such perception, not a little light is cast upon the ministries of those we are now more especially concerned with.

The very similarity of their names intimates a more than ordinary connection between them. According to that important rule of interpretation, the very first mention of Elisha in the Scriptures clearly defines his *relation* unto his predecessor. Unto Elijah the Lord said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet *in thy room*" (1Ki 19:16). Those words signify something more than he was to be his successor in the prophetic office: Elisha was to take Elijah's place as his accredited representative. This is confirmed by the fact that when he found Elisha, Elijah "cast his mantle upon him" (1Ki 19:19), which denotes the closest possible identification between them. In perfect accord with that is the reply Elisha made when, later, he was asked by the one whose place he was to take, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken [not "from Israel," but] away from thee"—namely, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (2Ki 2:9), which request was granted. Elisha, then, was far more than the historical successor of Elijah: He was appointed and anointed to be his representative—we might almost say, his "ambassador."

Elisha was the man called by God to take Elijah's place before Israel. Though Elijah had left this scene and gone on high, yet his ministry was not to cease. True, he was no longer here in person, yet, he was so in spirit. The starting-point of Elisha's ministry was the supernatural rapture of his master, and that the one was to carry on the work of the other was symbolically intimated by his initial act, for his first miracle was an exact duplication of the last one wrought by his predecessor, namely, the smiting and opening up of the waters of Jordan, so that he crossed over dry shod—the instrument used being Elijah's own mantle (2Ki 2:14)! The immediate sequel supplies further evidence in proof of what we have just pointed out: "And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him (2Ki 2:14, 15).

In 2 Kings 2:2, we read of "the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel" and in verse 5, we are also told of "the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho"—the latter numbering more than fifty (2Ki 2:17). By that expression (a Hebrew-ism), we understand that these young men had been converted under the ministries of Elijah and Elisha—for the latter had accompanied the former for some years previous to his rapture—and who were organized into schools. As we saw in an earlier meditation, there was yet another school of them at Gilgal (2Ki 4:38), and from their "sitting before him" (compare Deuteronomy 33:3, Luke 2:46 and 10:39), it is evident that Elisha devoted much of his time to their instruction and edification. Their owning him as "thou man of God" (2Ki 4:40) and "master" (2Ki 6:5) reveals plainly enough the relation which he sustained unto them, as does also their appeal to him for the enlarging of their living quarters (2Ki 6:1). He acted then as their rector or superintendent, and gained both their respect and their affection.

In the course of our studies, we have seen how Elisha wrought more than one miracle for the benefit of these students. Thus, through his intervention on her behalf, he enabled the widow of one of the children of the prophets—who had appealed to him in her dire extremity—to pay off her debt and save her two sons from being made bondmen to her debtor (2Ki 4:1-7). Next, he delivered a whole company of them from being poisoned when there was "death in the pot," which they were about to partake of (4:35-41). Then he rescued the head of the axe borrowed by another of them (6:3-7). Not only were the schools of the "sons of

the prophets” which were established by the Tishbite continued throughout the life of his successor, but in the above instances, we see how that Elisha acted toward them as Elijah would have done had he remained among them—using his extraordinary powers on their behalf as need arose and occasion required.

Let us now point out the *revelancy* of this somewhat lengthy preface to the incident we are now to contemplate. Our narrative opens by saying: “And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead: And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not” (2Ki 9:1-3). That can only be rightly apprehended in the light of what has just been pointed out.

If we turn back to 1 Kings 19:15, 16, it will be found that Elijah received the following commission: “And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” Concerning the anointing of Hazael, Scripture is silent; that of Elisha was accomplished when Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” (1Ki 19:19). At first sight, the long delay in the anointing of Jehu seems to present a difficulty, but if we take note of the particular work appointed for him to perform and compare an earlier passage, the difficulty is at once removed. Jehu was to be the Lord’s instrument of executing His vengeance on the wicked house of Ahab—a solemn announcement of which was made to that apostate monarch by Elijah in 1 Kings 21:21-24, and Jehu’s agency in connection therewith was intimated in 1 Kings 19:17.

Upon hearing that dreadful announcement from the lips of the Lord’s messenger, we are told that Ahab “rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (1Ki 21:27). Because of that external humbling of himself before Jehovah, He declared unto the prophet, “I will not bring the evil in his days but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house” (1Ki 21:29). Since that Divine decision was communicated to Elijah personally, we infer that it was tantamount to bidding him defer the anointing of Jehu. A respite having been granted unto Ahab—the commissioning of the one who was to execute the judgment—was also postponed. For the same reason, we conclude that since the time for the anointing of Jehu had not arrived before Elijah left this earth, that he transferred this particular duty to his successor, to the one who became “prophet in thy room” (1Ki 19:16)—as the Lord Jesus is said to have baptized those who were immersed by His disciples acting under His authority (Joh 4:1, 2).

But now the question arises: Why did not Elisha personally perform the task assigned him by the one whose representative he was? Why entrust it to a deputy? The principal reason given by M. Henry (and adopted by T. Scott) is that, it was too dangerous a task for Elisha to undertake; and therefore, it was not fit that he should expose himself—that being so well known, he had been promptly recognised, and therefore, he selected one who was more likely to escape observation. But such an explanation by no means commends itself to us, for it is entirely out of accord with everything else recorded of Elisha. The one who had spoken so boldly to King Jehoram (2Ki 3:13, 14), who was not afraid to give offence unto the mighty Naaman (2Ki 5:9-11), who had calmly sat in the house when the king had sworn he should be slain that day (2Ki 6:31, 32), and who possessed such power from God as to be able to smite with blindness those who sought to take him captive (2Ki 6:18), was hardly the one to shrink from an unpleasant task and invite another to face peril in his stead.

Since the Scriptures do not implicitly reveal to us the grounds on which Elisha here acted, none may attempt to dogmatically define the same. The most any writer can do is to form his own judgment from what is revealed, state his opinion, and submit it to the readers. Personally, we prefer to interpret Elisha’s action on this occasion in the light of the particular stage which had now been reached in his career. Nothing more is recorded about him after this incident save what immediately preceded his death. It appears then, that for some reason unknown to us (for he lived many years afterward), that he was about to retire from the stage of public action, and therefore that he would prepare the “sons of the prophets” and perhaps this one more particularly to take a more prominent part in the public life of Israel, and consequently was placing more responsibility upon them. It is not to be lost sight of—that it was also an important and distinguished mission this young man was now entrusted with, and that a high honour was conferred upon him.

“And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead” (2Ki 9:1). Elisha is not here desig-

nated “the man of God,” because no miracle was involved in what follows. Only here is he termed, “Elisha the prophet,” and only in 1 Kings 18:36 was his predecessor called “Elijah the prophet”—it intimated the *identification* of the one with the other. Elisha’s calling one of the children of the prophets to him manifests the *relation* which he sustained unto them—namely, as one having authority over them (compare our article on 2Ki 6:1-7). In the light of what was pointed out in the preceding paragraph, we may see in Elisha’s action an *example* which elderly ministers of the Gospel may well emulate—endeavouring to promote the training of their younger brethren, seeking to equip them for more important duties after they will have left this scene—on the principle which Paul acted upon: “And the things that thou hast heard of me...the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2Ti 2:2).

“And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber” (2Ki 9:2). Here we behold another example of the extraordinary powers possessed by Elisha—he knows where Jehu was to be found, that he would not be alone, the precise company he would be in, that he would be seated, and yet not in the inner chamber! But it was a trying ordeal to which he now subjected his deputy and a solemn errand on which he sent him. The wicked Jehoram (also called “Joram”) was still on the throne, and at that time, sojourning in Ramoth-gilead, where he was recovering from the wounds which the Syrians had given him in the recent battle at Ramah (2Ki 8:29). With him was the son of the king of Judah, who was visiting him in his sickness, and with him too were other members of the reigning house. The mission entrusted to the young prophet involved his entry into the royal quarters, his peremptory ordering one of the princes to accompany him to a private chamber, and then discharging the purpose for which he had come.

That purpose was not only to anoint and make him king, but to deliver an announcement which would to most temperaments be very unpleasant. But the minister of God—be he young or old—is not free to pick and choose either his sphere of labour, or the message he is to deliver. No, being but a “servant,” he is subject only to the will of his Master, and therefore, any self-seeking or self-pleasing is nothing else than a species of insubordination. Implicit obedience to the Lord—no matter what it may involve or cost him in this life—is what is required of him; and only by rendering such obedience, will he be rewarded in the next life by hearing from the lips of Christ Himself that commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat 25:21, 23). O that each young minister of Christ who reads these lines may be constrained to earnestly seek enabling grace that he may live and act now with the Day to come before him.

“Then take the box of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not” (2Ki 9:3). The young prophet was to make it unmistakably clear that he was acting in no private capacity, nor even as an agent of Elisha, but under the immediate authority of Jehovah Himself. It is most important that the minister of Christ should similarly conduct himself. He is to make it evident that he is commissioned by Heaven, not delivering a message of his own devising, nor acting as the agent of his denomination—only thus, is *God* honoured and only thus, will His servant preserve his true dignity and speak with Divine authority. When he has fulfilled his charge, then let him “tarry not”—that is, hang around in order to listen to the compliments of his hearers. Mark that kingship is of Divine appointment and institution (compare Pro 8:15), and therefore, are God’s people bidden to “honour the king” (1Pe 2:17). It is one of the marks of an apostate and degenerate age when “dominion” is despised and “dignities” are evil spoken of (Jud 8).

“So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead” (2Ki 9:4). Observe how the Holy Spirit has emphasised his youth! Often the babe in Christ is more pliable and responsive than an older Christian. Note that there is nothing to show he asked for an easier task, objected to this one on the score of his youth, nor that he felt “unworthy” for such a mission—which is more often the language of pride than of humility, for *none* is “worthy” to be commissioned of the Almighty. It is entirely a matter of sovereign grace, and in nowise one of personal merit, that any one is called to the ministry. Said the apostle Paul, “I was made a minister, according to the gift of the *grace* of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power” (Eph 3:7). Though he at once added, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). He referred to a two-fold “grace”—in calling and equipping him. When God calls one to His service, He also *furnishes* him—illustrated in this incident by “the box of oil” put into the young prophet’s hand.

“And when he came, behold, the captains of the host *were* sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. And he arose, and went

into the house" (2Ki 9:5, 6). We regard the "behold" as having a three-fold force: First, as calling attention to the accuracy of Elisha's indirect—but obvious—prediction in verse two. Second, as emphasising the severity of the ordeal which then confronted the young prophet—Jehu being surrounded by companions of note, and the likelihood that he would resent such an intrusion. Third, in view of what follows, as intimating the gracious hand of God so ordering things that Jehu promptly and uncomplainingly complied with the prophet's order; thus, making it much easier for him. In that, we may see how God ever delights to honour those who honour Him and show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him.

That which is recorded in 2 Kings 9:7-10, was evidently included in the commission which the young man had received from the Lord through Elisha, and which he now faithfully discharged. The fact that the prophet here made such an announcement, appears to supply strong confirmation of what was pointed out in our opening paragraphs—namely, that this deputy of Elisha was acting in the stead of Elijah, or as his representative, for if it be compared with 1 Kings 21:21-24, it will be found that it is practically an echo of the Tishbite's own words to Ahab. In the charge here given to Jehu, we are shown how he was to be God's battle axe (Jer 51:20) or sword of justice. Man might see in Jehu's conduct (see remainder of 2 Kings 9) nothing more than the ferocity of a human fiend, but in these verses, we are taken behind the scenes, as it were, and shown how he was appointed to be the executioner of God's judgments. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab 2:3)—true alike, whether the "vision" of prophecy foretells Divine mercy, or wrath, as the wicked house of Ahab was to discover.

"And he opened the door, and fled" (2Ki 9:10). This was most praiseworthy and should be duly taken to heart by us. The servant of God is not free to please himself at any point, but must carry out the orders he has received to the last letter of them. Most probably, had this young man lingered, Jehu—after receiving such a high favour at his hands—had evidenced his appreciation by bestowing some reward upon him, or at least feasted him at his royal table. But Elisha had bidden him, "open the door"—as soon as he had performed his errand—"flee, and tarry not" (2Ki 9:3); and here, we see his implicit obedience to his master. O that we may in all things render unqualified compliance with *our* Master's will. It is not without significance that in the very next verse, the young prophet is scornfully referred to as "this mad fellow" (2Ki 9:11) by one of the servants of the king—for the unregenerate are quite incapable of assessing at their true value the motives which prompt the faithful minister of Christ, and judging him by their own standards, regard him as crazy. But what is the contempt and ridicule of the world, if we have the approbation of the Lord? Nothing, and less than nothing—especially if we *expect* it, as we should do.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

8. *Its Promotion – Part 2*

It has often been said that, "Everything depends upon a right beginning." There is considerable force in that adage: If the foundation be faulty, the superstructure is certain to be insecure; if we take the wrong turn when starting out on a journey, the desired destination will not be reached—unless the error be corrected. It is indeed of vital importance for the professing Christian to measure himself by the unerring standard of God's Word, and make sure that his conversion was a sound one, and that his house is being built upon the rock and not upon the sand. Multitudes are deceived—fatally deceived—at this vital point: "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Pro 30:12). Therefore, are God's children expressly bidden, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2Co 13:5). Nor is that to be done in any half-hearted way: "Give *diligence* to make your calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10) is our bounden duty.

"Prove all things" (1Th 5:21): Take nothing for granted, give not yourself the benefit of any doubt, but verify your profession and certify your conversion, rest not satisfied until you have clear and reliable evidence that you are indeed a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then heed the exhortation that follows: "Prove all things; *hold fast* that which is good" (1Th 5:21). That is no needless caution, but one which it is incumbent upon us to take to heart. There is that still within you which is opposed to the Truth; yea, which loves a lie. Moreover, you will encounter fierce opposition from without, and be tempted to forsake the stand you have taken. More subtle still will be the evil example of lax professors, who will laugh at your strictness and seek to drag you down to their level. For these and other reasons, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Heb 2:1)—the "at any time" intimates we must constantly be on our guard against such a calamity.

"Let us *hold fast* the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised" (Heb 10:23); and therefore, we should be faithful in performing. See to it that you hide not your light under a bushel. Be not ashamed of your Christian uniform, but wear it on all occasions. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. Be not a compromiser and temporizer, but out and out for Christ. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and *hold fast*" (Rev 3:3). If your conversion was a saving one, you received that which was infinitely more precious than silver and gold—then prize it as such, and cling tenaciously to it. Hold fast the things of God in your memory by frequent meditation thereon, keep them warm in your affections and inviolate in your conscience. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev 3:11). If you have, by grace, bought the Truth, see to it that you "sell it not" (Pro 23:23)—be unflinching in your maintenance of it, and unswerving in your devotedness to Christ and what He has entrusted to you.

Thus, it is not only necessary that we begin aright, but it is equally essential that we continue right: "If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh 8:31). A persevering attendance on Christ's instructions is the best proof of the reality of our profession. Only by a steady faith in the person and work of Christ, a firm reliance on His promises, and regular obedience to His precepts—notwithstanding all opposition from the flesh, the world, and the Devil—do we approve ourselves to be His genuine disciples. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: *continue ye* in my love" (Joh 15:9)—continue in the believing enjoyment of it. And how is that to be accomplished? Why, by refraining from those things which would grieve that love, by doing those things which conduce to a fuller manifestation thereof. Nor is such counsel in the least degree "legalistic," as our Lord's very next words show: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (Joh 15:10).

It is perfectly true that if a soul has been regenerated by the Spirit of God that he *will* "hold on his way," yet it is equally true that holding on our way is the evidence or proof of our regeneration, and that if we do not so, then we only deceive ourselves if we suppose we are regenerated. The fact that God has promised to "perform" or "complete" the good work which He has begun in any of His people, does not render it needless for them to perform and complete the work which He has assigned them. Not so, did the apostles think or act. Paul and Barnabas spake to their followers and "persuaded them to *continue* in the grace

of God" (Act 13:43), which we understand to signify that they exhorted them not to be discouraged by the opposition they met with from the ungodly, nor allow the ragings of indwelling sin to becloud their apprehension of the Divine favour, but rather, to go on counting upon the superabounding of God's grace, and for them to more and more prove its sufficiency.

So, too, we find those same apostles going on to other places, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and *exhorting them to continue* in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). Very far were they from believing in the mechanical idea of "once saved, always saved," which is now so rife. They insisted on the needs-be for the discharge of the Christian's responsibility, and were faithful in warning him of both the difficulties and perils of the path he must steadfastly pursue if he was to enter Heaven. Yea, they hesitated not to say unto the saints that they would be presented unblameable and unreprieveable in God's sight, "*If ye continue* in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23). So, too, they exhorted them, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2)—watch against disinclination to prayer, be not discouraged if the answer be delayed, be persistent and importunate, be thankful for past and present mercies and expectant of future ones.

The Christian, then, is to continue along the same lines as he began. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus *the Lord*, so walk ye in him" (Col 2:6). Observe well where the emphasis is placed—it is not "Christ Jesus the Saviour" or "Redeemer," but "Christ Jesus *the Lord*." In order to receive Christ Jesus as "the Lord," it was necessary for you to forsake all that was opposed to Him (Isa 55:7); continue thus, and "not turn again to folly" (Psa 85:8). It was required that you throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and be reconciled to Him; then take them not up again, and "keep yourselves from idols" (1Jo 5:21). It was by surrendering yourself to His righteous claims and giving to Him the throne of your heart—then suffer not "*other lords*" to have "dominion over" you (Isa 26:13), but "yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead" (Rom 6:13). As William Romaine (1714-1795) pointed out, "He must be received always as He was received once." There is no change of Object, and there must be no change in us. Be willing, yea, glad for Him to rule over you.

But let us take note now of another word in that important verse: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so *walk* ye in him" (Col 2:6). Here, as in so many passages in the Epistles, the Christian life is likened unto a "walk," which denotes action, movement in a forward direction. We are not only required to "hold fast" what we have and to "continue" as we began, but we must *advance* and make steady progress. The "narrow...way" (Mat 7:14) has to be traversed if Life is to be entered into. There has to be a forgetting of those things which are behind (no complacent contentment with any previous attainment), and a "reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phi 3:13), pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi 3:14). There, the figure passes from walking to running—which is more strenuous and exacting. In Hebrews 12:1, 2, the Christian life is likened unto a *race*; and in 1 Corinthians 9:24, we are reminded, "they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?"—to which is added, "So run, that ye may *obtain*."

In these two articles on the promotion of spiritual growth, we have dwelt only on general principles; in those which immediately follow (D.V.) on the *means* of growth, we shall enter more into detail; but before turning to them, let us connect what has been pointed out in the above paragraphs with what we emphasised in the preceding article. Our main theme there was that, "in the final analysis, the spiritual growth of a Christian depends upon the *grace* which he continues to receive from God." Now, it should at once be apparent to any renewed soul that while it is obviously his duty to hold fast what he has received from God, to continue in the path of holiness, yea, to go forward therein, yet he will only be enabled to discharge those duties as he receives further supplies of strength and wisdom from above. Therefore, it is recorded for his encouragement, God "giveth more grace...giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam 4:6), and the "humble" are those who feel their need, who are emptied of self-confidence and self-complacency, who come as beggars to receive favours.

"Grace and peace be *multiplied* unto you" (2Pe 1:2). In connection with the apostolic salutations, it needs to be borne in mind, first, they were very much more than pious forms of greeting—namely, definite prayers on behalf of those to whom their epistles were addressed. Second, since such prayers were immediately and verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, they most certainly contained requests for those things which were "according to" the Divine will. Third, in supplicating God for what they did, the apostles set before their readers an example, teaching them what they most needed and what they should especially ask for.

Fourth, thus, Christians today have a sure index for their guidance and should be at no loss to decide whether they are warranted in praying for such and such a spiritual blessing. Believers today may be fully assured that it is both their privilege and duty to seek from God not only an increase, but also a multiplication of the grace which he has already bestowed upon them.

The need for increased grace is real and imperative. An active nature, such as man's is, must either grow worse or better—and therefore, we should be as deeply concerned about the increase of grace, as we should be cautious against the loss of grace. The Christian life is a pulling against the current of the flesh within, and the world without, and they who row against the stream must needs ply their oars vigorously and continuously, or the force of the waters will carry them backward. If a man be toiling up a sandy hill, he will sink down if he does not go forward—and unless the Christian's affections be increasingly set upon objects above, then they will soon be immersed in the things of time and sense. Very solemn and searching is that warning of our Lord's—the man who did not improve his talent lost it (Mat 25:28)!—many a Christian who once had zeal in the Lord's service and much joy in his soul have them no more. Yet, still more solemn is it to note that the call of "Let us go unto perfection" is at once followed by a description of the state and doom of apostates (Heb 6:1, 4).

As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) pointed out, "It is an ill sign to be contented with a little grace. He was never good that doth not desire to grow better. Spiritual things do not cloy in the enjoyment. He that hath once tasted the sweetness of grace hath arguments enough to make him seek further grace: Every degree of holiness is as desirable as the first; therefore, there can be no true holiness without a desire of perfect holiness. God giveth us a taste to this end and purpose that we may long for a fuller draught." Yet He does not force the further draught upon us, but often *tests* us to see if such is really wanted by us—as Christ after communing with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and making their hearts "burn within" them while He talked with them in the way, then "made as though he would have gone further" when they arrived at their destination; but they "constrained him, saying, Abide with us" (Luk 24:28-32). The grapes of Eshcol were a sample of what Canaan produced, and fired the zeal of Joshua and Caleb to go up and possess that land; but their unbelieving brethren were content with the sample—and never obtained anything more! (Num 13:17-33).

In the outward part of the Christian life, there may be too much—but not so in the inward. There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge, a restless energy of the flesh which spurs to activities which Scripture nowhere enjoins, but such works as those are termed "will worship" (Col 2:23), and are often dictated by mere tradition or superstition, or are simply the imitation of what other "church members" engage in. But there cannot be too much faith in God, too much of His holy fear upon us, too much knowledge of spiritual things, too much denying of self and devotion to Christ, nor too much love for our fellow saints. For all such virtues, we need "abundant grace" (2Co 4:15). There are some who are far from the kingdom of God, having no deep concern for their souls (Eph 2:13). There are others who come near to the kingdom of God (Mar 12:34), yet never enter into it (Mat 7:21-23). There are some who enter, but who make little progress and are poor testimonials to Christ (1Co 3:1). But there are a few of whom it is said, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom" (2Pe 1:11); and as the context shows, they are the ones who "give diligence"—putting their soul's interests before everything else.

Those who improve the grace given thereby make room for more (Luk 8:18), and ensure for themselves a more ample reward in the day to come. We fully concur with Thomas Manton that, "According to our measures of grace, so will our measures of glory be, for they that have most grace are vessels of a larger capacity—others are filled according to their size." We know there was not full agreement among the Puritans on this point, though we could quote from others of them who held there will be degrees of glory among the saints in Heaven, as there will be differences of punishment among the lost in Hell. And why not? There are considerable diversities among the angels on high (Eph 1:21, etc.). It cannot be gainsaid that God dispenses the gifts and graces of His Spirit *unequally* among His people on earth. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God will suit our rewards according to our services, and our crowns according to the improvement we have made of His grace and of our opportunities and privileges. The reaping will be in proportion to the sowing (2Co 9:6; Gal 6:8). True, every crown will be cast at the feet of Christ, but the crowns will not be in all respects alike. Labour, then, to get more grace and improve the same.

Thus, there is abundant reason *why* the child of God should not only seek for more grace, but that grace may be "multiplied" unto him (2Pe 1:2). If an earthly monarch should invite one of his subjects to

ask a favour of him, he would not feel himself flattered if only some trifling thing were requested. Nor do we honour the Sovereign of Heaven by making petty requests—"We are coming to a King; large petitions let us bring." Does He not bid us, "open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psa 81:10)—think you that He means not what He says? Does He not invite us, "drink, yea, drink *abundantly* [from the fountain of grace], O beloved" (Son 5:1)—then why not take Him at His word? He is "the God of *all* grace" (1Pe 5:10), and has revealed to us, "the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7); yea, "the exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph 2:7)—and for whom are they available, if not for those who feel their deep need of and trustfully seek them? "And God is *able* to make all grace abound toward you" (2Co 9:8), and He would not have told us this, if He was not also *willing* to do so.

And now let us anticipate an objection, which might be expressed thus: I realise that spiritual growth is entirely dependent on receiving fresh supplies of grace from God, and that it is my responsibility and duty to diligently and confidently seek the same. I *have* done so, yet, instead of grace having been "multiplied" to me, my stock has diminished: So far from having progressed, I have gone backward; instead of my iniquities being subdued (Mic 7:19), my lusts rage more fiercely than ever. Several replies may be made. First, you may not have sought as earnestly as you should. Asking and seeking are not sufficient—there has to be an insistent knocking (Mat 7:7), a holy *striving* with God (Rom 15:30), a saying with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26). Second, God's time to grant your request may not have arrived: "And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you" (Isa 30:18)—He waits to test your faith, and because He requires persistence and importunity from us. What is hard to obtain is valued more highly than that which comes easily.

Third, it is to be borne in mind that the infusion of grace into a soul promptly evokes the enmity of the flesh, and the more grace be given us, the more will sin resist it. Very soon after Christ came into the world, Herod stirred up all the country against Him, seeking to slay Him; and when Christ enters a soul, the whole of indwelling sin is stirred against Him—for He has come there as its Enemy. The more grace we have, the more conscious are we of our corruptions, and the more we are occupied with them, the less conscious are we of our grace. As grace is increased, so, too, is our sense of need. Fourth, God does not always answer in kind. You have asked for increased holiness, and been answered with more light; for the removal of a burden, and been given more strength to carry it. You have sought for victory over your lusts, and have been given *humbling* grace, so that you loath yourself more deeply. You have besought the Lord to take away some "thorn in the flesh" (2Co 12:7), and He has answered by giving you grace to bear it.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

7. *Its Meaning*

It may seem strange to some that we have deferred until now a consideration of the *meaning* of “reconciliation,” and to the critical reader, it must appear as a real defect. Ordinarily, a writer should define the terms which he uses at the beginning of his treatise; but in this case, we wish to do very much more than furnish a mere definition of the word itself—which was done in the opening paragraphs of our third article, in the May/1944 issue. Under the present division of our subject, we desire to consider more closely and definitely the thing itself. We have dwelt upon the need of reconciliation, its Author, its arrangement, and its effectuation. Now, we must describe more particularly what reconciliation actually *is*, as it concerns both God and His people. The previous articles have been paving the way for this, and in measure, furnishing materials for the same. And after what has already been presented, the reader should be able to follow more easily our present discussion than if we had introduced it at an earlier stage—as it also relieves the writer from taking anything for granted. It is on the foundations already laid we now propose to build.

It is also because that what we are to be engaged with concerns the more controversial aspect of our theme, that we sought to first make clear and establish from Scripture what must be regarded as the essential elements which enter into the equation. In seeking to ascertain more precisely the nature and character of reconciliation, we must carefully distinguish between cause and effect, between the means and end. Many are confused at this point, supposing that “atonement” and “reconciliation” are one and the same—the *sound* of the English word, “at-one-ment” leading them to miss its true *sense*. Unfortunately, this confusion is fostered by the only verse in the Authorised Version (which, in our judgment, has no equal) in the N.T. where it occurs: “By whom [namely, Jesus Christ] we have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11)—unhappily, few avail themselves of the marginal alternative (generally, the better rendition) where it is rightly given as “reconciliation.” To speak of *our* “receiving” the Atonement does not make sense—for it was *God* and not ourselves who required an atonement or satisfaction; but it *is* correct to say that believers “receive” the reconciliation which Christ effected for them.

To “atone” is to placate or appease, to make reparation for injury or amends for wrongs done another. “Atonement” simply signifies that a satisfaction has been made, that the demands of the Divine Law have been met, that justice has been honoured, that God has been propitiated. The literal force of the Hebrew “kaphar” (generally rendered, “atonement” in the O.T.) is a “covering”; and thus, its appropriateness for this usage is clear—the sacrificial blood covered what was an affront to the offended eye of God by means of an adequate compensation. The term is applied to the “mercy-seat,” which was the lid or cover of the ark of the covenant—and therefore, a Divinely-appointed symbol closely connected with the presentation of sacrifices on the day of expiation. Thus, there can be no objection to rendering, “Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:24, 25), so long as its purport be explained and the “blood” be duly emphasised.

The principal idea, then, expressed by the word “kaphar”—“atonement”—is that of averting vengeance by means of a placating offering. It is rendered, “appease” in Genesis 32:20. When Jacob was about to make the dreaded meeting with Esau, he sent his servants with droves of animals before him, saying, “I will appease [“kaphar”] him with the present that goeth before me”! In Numbers 35:31, it is written, “Moreover ye shall take no *satisfaction* [no “kaphar”] for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death,” which, again, helps us to ascertain the force of this most important Hebrew word; the word, “satisfaction,” meaning, of course, a legal compensation—none such being allowed in case of murder—vengeance must take its course. “Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer and put fire therein from off the altar and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation and make an *atonement* for them, for there is *wrath* gone out from the Lord, the plague is begun” (Num 16:46)—here, we see that “atonement” was plainly the means for propitiating Jehovah, for turning away His vengeance.

Now such was the Atonement made unto God by the Lord Jesus Christ: His sacrifice was offered for the satisfying of Divine justice, for the averting of Divine wrath from His people. God sent His Son to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). The judicial displeasure of God was turned away from His Church by means of the substitutionary interposition of the Lamb, who was slain in their stead. The righteous vengeance of God was appeased by the Surety, pouring out His soul unto death. Certain effects or results followed from that—the sins of God’s elect were blotted out, they were redeemed from the curse of

the Law, and God was reconciled to them. The Atonement was the cause, the means, the root; reconciliation was the effect, the end, the fruit. Thus, the two things are clearly distinguished and should never be confounded. The very fact that the N.T. employs two entirely different words—"hilasmos" (1Jo 2:2, 4:10) and "katallage" (Rom 5:11)—shows plainly they are not the same, the latter resulting from the former.

It is a pity that the honourable translators of the A.V. did not always preserve that important distinction. Another verse which has served to cloud the judgment of English readers is Hebrews 2:17, where we are told the Son became incarnate that "he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"—which is correctly rendered (as J. Owen and others of the Puritans long ago insisted that it should be) in the R.V., namely, "make *propitiation* for the sins of the people." Because Christ made propitiation for their sins, the wrath of God was turned away from them and reconciliation was the outcome: "Having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20) sums it up, and shows both the end and the means by which it was accomplished. That our English word, "at-one" signifies to *reconcile* and *not* to "propitiate" is evident from Act 7:26—Moses "would have set them at one again" (i.e., restore them to amity)—the Greek word being rendered "peace" elsewhere.

But at this point, we need to be careful in guarding against a misconception and the drawing of a wrong conclusion. While the atonement of Christ was an *appeasement*, it must *not* be regarded as an *inducement*—that is, as a price which the Redeemer had to pay in order to incline God to love His people. Yet, it is right here that the enemies of the Gospel have made their main attack upon that aspect of it, which we are now considering. They have accused those who maintain the Scriptural doctrine of propitiation in order to reconciliation, as denying the Divine benevolence, as arguing that Christ shed His precious blood in order to induce God to love sinners, that those who insist God required an appeasing sacrifice—before He would be gracious unto transgressors—are guilty of grievously misrepresenting the Divine character. But Socinians are the ones who wretchedly pervert the teachings of sound theologians when they charge them with portraying the cross of Christ as the means of changing God from a merciless Tyrant, into a benevolent Being.¹

Socinians grievously wrest the Truth when they argue that those who proclaim the propitiatory character of Christ's death teach that His death wrought a change in God, that He produced a different feeling within Him with regard to sinners. So far from *that*, the very men who have most faithfully and fearlessly magnified the ineffable holiness of God in its antagonism against sin and His inexorable justice in punishing it, have been the ones who also made it crystal clear that love to sinners, a determination to save His people from the curse of the Law, existed eternally in the Divine mind, that it was the love of God for His Church, His compassion for its members, which moves Him to devise and execute the plan of salvation, and to send His beloved to save them by making an atonement for their sins. Christ the Atoner was provided and given by *the Father* for His people! It was at His own tremendous cost—by not sparing His Son, but delivering Him up for them all—that the Father supplied that very compensation, which His holiness and justice demanded.

We must not for a moment suppose that the atonement was in order to change the good-will of the Father toward those on whose behalf it was offered. No, He gave His elect—the objects of His everlasting and unchanging love—to the Son, and He gave the Son of His love to and for them. All that we owe unto Christ we owe unto God who gave Him: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2Co 9:15). Nevertheless, the atonement was essentially necessary in order that God's love might flow to them in an *honourable channel*; that, so far from the glory of God being tarnished by their salvation, so far from His evidencing the slightest complicity in their sin, every Divine attribute might be placed in a more conspicuous view, so that—in clothing His Church with the everlasting righteousness of His Son and adorning them with all the beauties of holiness, unto the enjoyment of an exceeding, even eternal weight of glory—God might appear "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Exo 15:11)—let it be noted that verse is taken from Israel's song of *redemption* (Exo 15:13) after the destruction of their enemies at the Red Sea.

Nowhere does the love of God shine so illustriously as at the Cross. To die for a friend is the highest instance of love among mankind—an instance but rarely found. But God commendeth His love to men, in that, while they were *sinners*, Christ died for them (Rom 5:8)—died for those who were "alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works" (Col 1:21). This is the most amazing feature of it. It may then be

¹ *Socinianism* – a form of anti-Trinitarianism theology prominent in 16th & 17th century Europe, based on the works of Faustus Socinus, who maintained that there was only God the Father, a single divine being. He said the Holy Ghost was not a person but a divine force, not God, and not coequal to the Father—an exceptional man without sin, but not divine.

reasonably inferred that God loves whatever is lovely; but it may with equal certainty be inferred that whatever is unamiable displeases Him. Human reason, then, could never have discovered a way in which sinners should be the proper objects of Divine love. But the Scriptures reveal how God's wisdom found a way whereby He has made the most loathsome objects *worthy* of His love! In the atoning death of Christ, all their pollutions are washed away, and in His perfect righteousness, they stand graced before God with all the merits of their Surety—more worthy than the light of the holy angels.

So far from teaching that the atonement of Christ was the procuring-cause of God's love unto His people, we emphatically insist that God's love for them was the moving cause of giving Christ to suffer and die for them, that their sins might be atoned for. It is not that there was insufficient love in God to save sinners without the death of His Son, but that He determined to save them in such a way as gloriously exhibited His righteousness too. The love of God wrought in a way of holiness and justice. He did not choose to receive sinners into His favour without giving public expression to His detestation of their iniquities, but, as the entire universe will yet learn, cried, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd" (Zec 13:7), so that "he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). God's love triumphed at the cross, yet, not at the expense of Law! Let the reader judge, then, whether the Socinian or the Calvinist furnishes the most Scriptural and blessed exhibition of the Divine character and government.

The main objection made by those who formally reject the Atonement is that it is inconsistent with the love of God. God needed nothing, they say, but His own goodness to incline Him to show mercy unto sinners—or if He did, it could not be of grace, since a price was paid to obtain it. But in the light of what has been pointed out above, it should be quite evident that such an objection is utterly pointless, confusing the moving *cause* of mercy unto sinners with the *manner* of showing it. The sacrifice of Christ was not the cause, but the effect of God's love. The love of God was amply sufficient to have pardoned the vilest sinner without any atonement—had God deemed it consistent with the holiness of His character and the righteousness of His government. David was not wanting in love for his son Absalom, for he "longed to go forth unto Absalom" (2Sa 13:39), but he felt for his own honour as the head of the family and the nation, which, had he admitted him immediately to his presence, would have been compromised and the crime of murder connived at. Hence, for a time, David kept Absalom at a distance, and when introduced, it must be by a mediator.

As Octavius Winslow (1808-1878) so sublimely expressed it: "It is a self-evident truth that, as God only *knows*, so He only can *reveal* His love. It is a hidden love, veiled deep within the recesses of His infinitude, yea, it seems to comprise His very essential, for 'God is love' (1Jo 4:8, 16)—not merely lovely and loving, but love itself, essential love. Who, then, can reveal it but Himself? 'In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1Jo 4:9, 10). But behold God's love! See how He has inscribed this glorious perfection of His nature in letters of blood drawn from the heart of Jesus. His love was so great that nothing short of the death of His beloved Son could give an adequate expression of its immensity.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (Joh 3:16). Here was the great miracle of love. Here was its most stupendous acknowledgment: Here, its most brilliant victory—and here its most costly and precious offering, 'Herein is love' (1Jo 4:10) —as though the apostle would say, 'and nowhere but *here*.' That God should punish the (intrinsically) Innocent for the guilty—that He should exact His co-equal Son to cancel the guilt of rebels—that He should lay an infinite weight of wrath on His soul in order to Lay an infinite value of love on ours—that He should sacrifice His life of priceless value for ours, worthless, forfeited and doomed—that the Lord of glory should become the Man of sorrows—the Lord of life should die and the Heir of all things be as 'He that serveth' (Luk 22:27). O the depths of love unfathomable! O the height of love unsearchable! O the length and breadth of love unmeasureable! O the love of God which paseth knowledge! (Eph 3:19)" [*end Winslow quotation*].

"Great is the mystery of godliness" (1Ti 3:16) is the Spirit's own declaration. Therefore, the finite mind—especially in its present condition (impaired by sin and clouded by prejudice)—must expect to encounter features beyond its comprehension. Nevertheless, it is our privilege both to receive all that Holy Writ reveals thereon and beg God for a spiritual understanding of the same, and to refuse to reject any aspect of the Truth, because we, forsooth, are unable to perceive its harmony with some other aspect. The

Scriptures plainly teach that the Atonement of Christ was an appeasement of the wrath of God against His people, yet they are equally clear in making known that the Atonement was *not* made as an inducement of the love of God unto His people. The Saviour did not shed His blood in order to procure God's love for His Church; rather, it was God's gift of the Redeemer as the supreme expression of His love for it. The Atonement appeased the wrath of God in His official character as the Judge of all; the love of God is His goodwill unto the elect as the covenant God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PASTORAL COUNSELS

The following was written by Samuel Bury, a seventeenth century Presbyterian minister (bap. 1663, d. 1730)

“Most loving and dearly beloved: Knowing that shortly, I must put off this my tabernacle, I am constrained to leave you this last testimony of my love. How much soever I have failed in my duty to you, yet God is my witness, how sincerely I love you all, and that I never appeared in the mount before Him in secret, but I had you all in my heart there. I am now to serve you no more, in my former station. I blush to think I have served you no better, but I am glad I have done it at all—for, blessed be God, I have a comfortable list of many sincere converts among you, as well as in other places, who are effectually called and brought home to Christ, and boldly call me their spiritual father, and who shall be my joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

“I have made it my business to preach unto and press upon you the substantial doctrines and duties of religion—which I was fully assured—were well grounded upon Holy Scripture. I was always afraid of apocryphal sins and duties—I mean, charging any thing upon you as sin or duty for which I had not Scripture, but only imaginary proof. I bless God I have made it the business of a considerable part of my life to get ready for death, and have now finished the work which God gave me to do. I can comfortably look into another world, in hope of a reward, not of debt, but of grace. Nor is it any terror to me to appear before the awful bar of God, whilst I can keep a steadfast eye upon my Advocate, pleading for me there.

“I have been solemnly ordained to the work of the ministry, and I bless God I have taken much pleasure in it, especially where I have found I have been useful and acceptable to the people. I was never proselyted to a party as such, but have endeavoured to serve God as a catholic Christian. I could not conform as a minister to the present establishment of the Church of England, because of such difficulties—which, after the most impartial study, have appeared to me insuperable—nor could I ever be reconciled to the temper or interest of unpeaceable Dissenters, who would censure and unchurch all men that were out of their way. I have loved a conformist, as well, and as cordially as a non-conformist—when both have been so, for conscience sake, and when the power of godliness has appeared in both.

“I am now within sight of the world of light, love and peace, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, but before I leave the world I am now in, I must take my solemn farewell of my people. I am now never to speak to you from the pulpit more, nor will you ever see my face again till the last appearance at the great day. Suffer me, therefore, I beseech you most solemnly, to charge upon you all, as your dying pastor, and as one that must meet you ere long at the Lord’s bar, that you do not compliment God and your own precious souls; but make religion the work of your lives, in defiance of all avocations and encumbrances of this world. Whatever becomes of your shop and counters, be sure to mind your closets. Seek an interest in Christ without delay. Embrace Him as He is freely offered in the Gospel. Never trust your own hearts, in matters of salvation, without an impartial scrutiny. Every day, examine yourselves in order to know your state for a better world, and suffer not any strangeness betwixt God and you; take heed of the least blot on any of your evidences for eternal life. Maintain an inviolable respect to both tables of God’s Law; and in all your religious and secular concerns, see that you keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards man; and let every day’s practice be, to amend the past day’s errors. Make conscience of relative duties to each other. Set up family instruction, and make the world stoop to your daily acts of Divine worship. Diligently observe yourselves and your families, and endeavour to keep your children and servants from the infection of bad company. Observe also that you be not ashamed of Christ and godliness, though others may reproach you for it—it being much easier to bear man’s censure than God’s anger. Have an especial regard to the sanctification of the Sabbath, both in the public assembly, and in your families and closets, and give diligent attention and constant and early attendance on all ordinances. Keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace and love, and be examples to others, both by your Christian temper and conduct.

“I now leave and commit you all to the care of the great and good Shepherd, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to keep you, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. I am, your affectionate and dying pastor—*Samuel Bury, Bristol.*”

