

Vol. XXV

June, 1946

No. 6

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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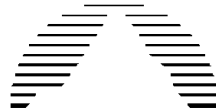
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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COMMANDED SUBJECTION

The longer this writer lives, the more deeply is he convinced that the Scriptures cannot possibly be of human origination, but are Divinely inspired. Many and varied are the considerations which contribute unto that conviction, among them being the wondrous *balance* of God's Word, a balance which is both unique and perfect. Though the Word forbids a believer to be subject unto any who usurp authority; yet it is far from teaching that he is a law unto himself, independent of others, not to be subordinate unto any save God Himself. As it is in nature, so it is in grace: God has constituted us so that, to a considerable extent, we are mutually dependent. Those on the land are much indebted unto those who man the ships and sail the seas. The factories cannot turn out their products unless the miners go down into the pits and hew coal for the furnaces. This magazine could not be published and circulated abroad, unless paper were manufactured, ink made, the printing press manned, and the post office operated. No man liveth unto himself, naturally or spiritually. God has appointed the evangelist to carry the Gospel to the perishing, and the pastor to feed His sheep. He who has made us sociable creatures naturally, "setteth the solitary in families" (Psa 68:6) spiritually.

Nay more: If God has constituted the human family that its members are dependent one upon another, so has He made them beholden to those who occupy a *lower grade* in the scale of creation—having to turn unto the animals for much of our food and clothing, and even to inanimate nature for materials, out of which to manufacture the necessary implements to work with. It is the same with those who belong to His spiritual family, who are likened by Him unto the organs of our body: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (1Co 12:21-22). Even those whom God has called to minister spiritual things unto His people are themselves supported temporally by the contributions of those unto whom they minister. Thus, does He stain pride! If then believers are forbidden to call any man "father" or "master" in a sense of suffering him to dominate the conscience or domineer over the life, yet they are also commanded, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21).

"We are all Popes by nature, and every man is prone to claim to himself an infallible chair, to the decisions of which, if others oppose themselves, he is ready to throw out angry bulls and 'bitter words'; yet the Spirit puts this papal spirit down within His children, and tells them not to domineer, but to sit meekly at the Master's feet, or to walk humbly in the sense of their own weakness and dependence upon Him" (Ambrose Serle, 1742-1812). Though the first part of that statement be somewhat of a sweeping generalization, yet there is no doubt it is true of the majority of us. All are not cast in the same mould or born with a like temperament—some having disposition and determination to take the lead; others preferring to have their thinking and planning done for them and be led. But while some are naturally meek and mild, yielding and submissive, a far greater number are aggressive and self-assertive. Though Divine grace moderates and regulates our natural characteristics, yet it does not obliterate them; and therefore, unto one class, the call is given: "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1Co 16:13); unto another, the word is: "Put on...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness" (Col 3:12).

As the Christian must not degenerate into the slave of a religious dictator, neither must he cultivate a spirit of arrogance, self-sufficiency, and self-superiority. Here, as everywhere, the teaching of Holy Writ preserves the balance. The Gospel of Christ neither inculcates a servile spirit on the one side, nor does it tolerate an arbitrary and despotic bearing on the other. If God has given to the individual Christian the right of private judgment, bidding him to "prove all things" (1Th 5:21) for himself, He has also told him, "he that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul" (Pro 15:32); and He enjoins us all to cultivate a meek and teachable spirit, so that we are willing and ready to learn things even from a child. If the Saviour bade His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Mat 16:6, 11), and warned them against cherishing their tyrannical spirit, yet He also said unto them, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall *not be so among you*" (Mat 20:25-26). The righteous are indeed "bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1); nevertheless, an essential part of the spiritual fruit borne by them is "longsuffering, gentleness...meekness" (Gal 5:22-23).

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21). At first glance, it would seem that such a precept is contradictory, or at least paradoxical, for how is it practicable for all the members of a

well-ordered church to practise *mutual* submission? Or if Christians be considered in their natural and social relations, both unto each other and unto their fellow-creatures, how can such an injunction be carried out? Must the husband submit to his wife, as well as the wife to her husband; is the father to defer to his children, as well as they render obedience to him; is the master to be submissive to his servant? Does this exhortation reduce all of the saints to one common level, thereby eliminating all order, grades, and government among them? Certainly not, as the verses that immediately follow plainly show. The grace of God in regeneration cancels no natural tie, but rather brings it under a new and higher sanction. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) is very far from teaching that the new birth obliterates all natural distinctions. But grace *does* put down pride and forbids all assertions of superiority, enjoining mutual submission.

Before seeking to remove the apparent difficulty presented by Ephesians 5:21, let us point out that this verse is far from standing alone; rather is the Christian duty there specified enforced again and again in the New Testament. It came first from the lips of our Lord to His disciples: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat 20:26-28)—meekness and lowliness is to characterize the followers of the Lamb. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10)—not aspiring after and contending for superiority. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) expresses in slightly different language the selfsame Christian duty. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phi 2:3-4). How very different things would be among the Lord's people if we all complied with the above rules!

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1Pe 5:5). Ah, does not *that* explain the seeming paradox in Ephesians 5:21! If only we were "clothed with humility," there would be no difficulty in understanding and no obstacle in the way of the outworking of the "all of you be subject one to another." It is another case where the heart, rather than the head, is needed for interpreting. If *love* be mutual exercise, all will be plain, simple, and delightful. But our subject is too important, too much needed—by writer and reader alike—to dismiss so briefly, so we hope to amplify this in a further article in a later issue.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

30. Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 6

“That ye...may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:17-19) was the third petition in this wondrous prayer. Is not the reader at once struck with the difference between this request, and the nature of one which he is accustomed to hearing in public prayers—and one which very likely he, himself, frequently makes use of? How many of God’s people are wont to ask for an increase of *their* love to Christ. Yet not so did the apostle here pray. We generally ask for more *enjoyment* of Christ’s love to us, but even that is not what Paul directly made supplication for. His request was that we might have a fuller comprehension and a deeper knowledge of *His* love, and we may be sure that he prayed aright, and therefore, that it is our wisdom to follow his example. That to which we have just called attention supplies a further illustration of what we not infrequently point out in these pages—namely, that man ever reverses God’s order; and of course, he is the loser thereby. It is by faith’s occupation with the infinite love of Christ and meditations upon its characteristics and manifestations that our poor love is increased. May we not legitimately apply here those words, “while I was musing [on His love] the fire burned” (Psa 39:3)—in my heart!

That for which the apostle here made request was that God’s people might have a more spiritual and enlarged view of the immeasurable love of Christ, that their understandings might be swallowed up in it, that their renewed minds might be more and more filled with the wonders of it, and that they should enter into a deeper experimental acquaintance with the same. All the discoveries which the Holy Spirit makes unto us of the love of Christ are in the Word and by the Word, and we are brought to a spiritual discernment thereof by the exercise of faith thereon. Christ’s love only becomes to us a subject of apprehension, as it is evidenced in its manifestations; and we only obtain a spiritual knowledge thereof as we personally drink of it. Even the renewed understanding is not able of itself to grasp the surpassing love of Christ, but the understanding led by the *heart* can lay hold of it and find in it fuller satisfaction. Though necessarily imperfect and incomplete, the Christian’s knowledge of Christ’s love is real and ravishing; and it should be constantly deepening and enlarging. It “passeth knowledge” not only because it is infinite, and therefore, incomprehensible to the finite mind, but also because our personal experience and enjoyment of the same can never exhaust it—we do but touch its edges and skim its surface.

We have intimated somewhat in the last paragraph what we regard as the difference between “comprehending” and “knowing.” Perhaps it was no part of the Spirit’s design that we should draw any broad line between them, but so far as we can perceive, it seems to us that the “comprehending” is via the understanding, the “knowing” via the heart—the former being more the result of mental effort; the other, of intuition. Thus, to “know”—in addition to “comprehend”—is to have a feeling sense of the love of Christ, or an experimental acquaintance with it: Though it transcends the grasp of our intellect, yet it is a subject of inward consciousness; though it can be but faintly recognised, it may be adoringly appreciated. As the Spirit graciously takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, as He opens to us more and more the love of Christ by His own effectual teaching, and as He opens our minds in a gradual and imperceptible way to understand, to exercise our thoughts upon it, we enjoy the same in our hearts. That knowledge being formed within becomes a spiritual part of us, so that what we read in the Word concerning the love of Christ we *know* the truth thereof, for we have the reality of it within our own souls.

“To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:19). We do not agree with those who say that is the language of paradox; rather is it a plain statement of fact. We may, we can, we do know the love of Christ, in the sense explained above: We believe it, we experience it, we enjoy it as a blessed and glorious reality. Yet our knowledge is but inadequate and imperfect—for being infinite, the love of Christ can never be entirely compassed, explored, or exhausted by us. As Sam E. Pierce pointed out: “All that is known of the love of Christ in and by all the saints on earth: all that is known and enjoyed of the love of Christ by all the saints in heaven, is far below what is contained in the person and love of Christ, as considered in His own heart towards us. I have, under this view of the subject, often said we shall never know any thing of the love wherewith Christ hath loved us, either in time or eternity, but by its *fruits and effects*...The love of Christ surpasseth the whole of His sufferings, as much as they surpass all our guilt and sin. His love was the cause, and His sufferings the effect of it.” As the cause excels the effect, as the tree is greater than its fruit, so the fountain of Christ’s love exceeds all the streams which flow from it unto us.

“Angels and saints before the throne never can enter fully into the love of Christ towards His Church and people. The subject is infinite, and their minds are finite. As finite cannot comprehend that which is infinite, so the saints can never, to the ages of eternity, fully understand the fulness of Christ’s love. Why, then, is this request made? I reply, Because this is the very nature of true grace, to be reaching out after that knowledge of God in Christ which can never be fully attained—no, not in heaven. Paul prays for what those saints have not attained. Yet he prays for what might, even in this life, *be* attained—that is, in a greater measure and degree. We see from hence that both in prayer and preaching, it must be so—it ought to be so—that some subjects must be prayed for, and preached to, which are beyond our present attainments, (and it may be, will exceed our knowledge) and enjoyment in this life. Indeed, it is in this way that much of our spirituality is discovered. Hereby our real aspirations heavenward are made manifest—to have higher views of the love of Christ than we have ever yet had. Here a little and there a little, He lets down some bright beams of light from His glorious person on our minds, so that in His light, we see light” (S. Pierce).

From all that has been said, it should be evident it is a matter of the deepest importance that the saint should appropriate this petition to himself, that he should make it his paramount concern to be more and more absorbed with the love of Christ, exercising his mind thereon, feeding his soul therefrom, delighting his heart therein. That he should attentively consider the revelation given of it in the Word of Truth, meditating upon its ineffable characteristics, contemplating its wondrous manifestations, and realising that Christ’s love to His own is eternal, infinite, and unalterable—not only without cessation, but without the least diminution. Such a subject is worthy of our best attention and constant pursuit. It will amply repay our best efforts and greatly enrich our spiritual lives. Nothing will so much excite gratitude in our hearts as a contemplation of the love of Christ to such unlovely creatures as we are. Nothing will prompt so effectually unto a life of self-denial. Nothing will make so pleasant and easy a walk of obedience to Him. Nothing will so deaden us unto the world. Nothing else can so fill us with peace—yes, and with joy—in a season of affliction or bereavement. Nothing can bring such radiance to a death-bed.

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). This is the closing and climacteric request. It is one which has met with ridicule from sceptical and cold critics—for regarding its language in a carnal manner, they suppose it teaches the absurdity of the finite compassing the Infinite, or of man being Deified. They imagine the apostle’s enthusiasm ran away with him, that in his devotional ecstasy, he forgot the limits that separate the creature from the Creator. But of those who would, by grace, promptly reject such horrible impieties, some are probably inclined to ask, How is it possible for such creatures as we are, compassed with infirmity, harassed and handicapped by indwelling sin, to expect such a favoured and exalted experience to ever be realised by us in this life? Rather does it appear to us that such a doubting and doleful question like that ought to be met with the retort, How was it possible that such a prayer should ever have issued from inspired lips, unless the blessings requested *are* attainable? Surely, no real Christian is prepared to affirm that the beloved apostle was wasting his breath in so supplicating God.

Instead of questioning, or at least being staggered by this petition, we ought to be rebuked and humbled for being surprised at Paul’s asking that saints might be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). Such a petition should shame us for the paucity and pettiness of our requests, indicative as they are of comparative contentedness with a sadly low level of spirituality—failing to act according to our privileges, as those who are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Instead of counting upon the Divine munificence, instead of availing ourselves of the fulness which there is in Him, we limit the Holy One and treat Him almost as though He were as poor as ourselves. Alas, how often our expectations are measured by our meagre attainments, instead of our expectations being formed by the revealed character of the One who is “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10). View this petition, then, as the spiritual corrective to our faithless doubtings and groveling hopes. View it as intimating what the Christian—every Christian—may legitimately aspire unto and for which he ought daily to supplicate. View it as a revelation of the Father’s heart, making known to His children the high privilege and favoured portion which it is His will for them to enjoy. Yet remember that this is not the first, but the final petition!

In a previous article, we sought to show how that our being “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17) was both a consequence of Christ’s dwelling in our hearts by faith and also the necessary condition of our being able to comprehend and know His surpassing love. It is equally true that having our hearts and minds constantly occupied with the love of Christ is an essential preparation for our becoming “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19)—for it is by the increasing apprehension and experience of the former that we are fitted for, and led on to, the latter. The more we revel in the wondrous love of God in Christ, the more

our minds are exercised upon the same; and the more largely we drink of that Divine nectar, the more are our capacities enlarged, and the greater and higher become our expectations for the reception of other blessings. It is then that we, too, begin reasoning with the apostle: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not *with him* also freely give us *all things*?" (Rom 8:32)! As we become more and more occupied with the love of God in Christ, both our desires and our expectations are raised, so that we look to God and count upon His giving us all things necessary for our holiness, happiness, and satisfaction.

Is there not a perceivable and glorious fitness in God's imparting His fulness to us through our knowledge of the love of Christ? In the first place, it is in, by, and through Christ—and particularly in His dying love—that the fulness of the Divine character is *displayed*. Not a little is seen of Him in His other works, but only in Christ are His perfections fully revealed. "No man hath seen God [adequately and clearly: compare Matthew 5:8] at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath *declared him*" (Joh 1:18). Some of God's attributes were exhibited in creation and in Providence, but it is in the work of redemption—and in that alone—that His full excellency appears. Great as were some of the displays of His glory under former dispensations—as at the Flood and His appearing at Sinai, they contained only a partial manifestation of Him. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb 1:1)—whose communications were at most but occasional and fragmentary; "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb 1:2)—Christ is the perfect, final, climacteric revelation of God. Said He, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Joh 14:9).

In the second place, it is through the dying love of Christ that a way has been opened for the *communication* of Divine blessing unto guilty creatures. The fulness of God, especially His philanthropy and munificence, may be likened unto a mighty stream; and sin, unto an extensive and high mountain which stands in the way of its progress, and so prevents our being filled by it. Had He so pleased, God could have—by the simple fiat of His invincible will—removed that mountain, but where then had been a display of His justice and holiness? Nor could man, by his own efforts; no, not the combined efforts of the entire human race obliterate that "abominable thing," which kept him at a guilty distance from God and cut him off from His favour. God deemed it most for His glory, best suited to His moral perfections, to ordain that the mediatorial work of His incarnate Son should take away the sins of His people, and open a way through which His infinite blessings should flow forth to them. Accordingly, it was by the sacrifice of Christ that the mountain of our sins was removed and cast into the depths of the sea. Then the way was all clear for the fulness of God's heart to believing sinners to flow forth unto them, without the least dishonour attaching to His character as having connived at sin. It is through Christ that the bounties of God come to His people.

In the third place, it is as knowing the love of Christ that we *imbibe*—drink of—become recipients of the Divine fulness. To be filled with the fulness of God, it is not only necessary that that fulness be exhibited to us—and a way opened for its being consistently (or morally) communicated to us—but also that the soul be emptied of those impediments which obstruct its entrance. As Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) expressed it, "The way to be filled with God's fulness is to bring no money in our sacks' mouth." The un-renewed mind is incapable of being filled with the fulness of God: There is no room in it for the same, for it is already pre-occupied with other things—all *its* thoughts, desires, and affections are centered upon the trash of this world. Even though it assume a religious pose, it is still so bloated with self-sufficiency and self-righteousness that there is no place for a *free* salvation, for Divine *grace*. But where the love of Christ is personally and experimentally known, as it is revealed in the Gospel and realised in the soul by the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit, then all other things are counted loss, and the fulness of God finds ready access. Occupation of the heart with Christ and His love both capacitates and causes us to imbibe the Divine fulness. So much then for the connection of the fourth to the third petition.

"That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). What a petition is this! It is cumulative in its force: That ye might be filled; filled with God; filled with the fullness of God; filled with all the fulness of God. Who can comprehend all it contains? What human pen is capable of "opening" its significance? As one writer said in his very brief comments on the prayer as a whole, "In attempting to explain such portions of Scripture, it is almost impossible to avoid comparative flatness and insipidity; an inspired writer alone could do justice to them." Such is exactly how we feel: We can but do our poor best according to our limited measure and the light which God has granted us. It should be obvious to any anointed eye that such language cannot signify (as philosophically understood) that the finite shall ever contain the Infinite, or that we should cease to be human creatures and become as God Himself. No, that can never be. It is

the Christian's being filled with all the fulness of God, according to his measure as a new creature in Christ, and in such a proportion as he is capable of in this life. Not that he is ever to be satisfied with any present measure of attainment in Divine things, but constantly seeking after and reaching forth unto an enlarged degree of the same. Only those who "hunger and thirst" are assured of being "filled" (Mat 5:6).

This expression, "the fulness of God" is capable of being grammatically construed in two ways, according as we regard "God" as the genitive of the subject (i.e. the "fulness" of which God Himself *is full*); or the genitive of the object, namely, the fulness which flows from Him, or that plenitude which He *communicates* in His gifts to us. The commentators differ as to which is to be preferred; personally, we take *both*, declining to place any limitation on the expression, and shall treat of it accordingly. It may also be pointed out that the Greek word, "filled *with* all the fulness of God" is rendered in the Revised Version, "filled *unto* all the fulness of God," which suggests the idea of a continuous process, a progressive and enlarging experience—for the ultimate aim of all genuine spiritual desire is to know God so intimately, so as to be filled to satiety by Him. This, too, we include in our understanding of the expression. Thus, a vessel may be filled up to its very brim; but suppose the size of that vessel should be *enlarged*, and continue to be enlarged, then its capacity to receive is ever increasing! Such is indeed the case—and ever will be throughout the unending ages of eternity—with the heart of the regenerate: The more the soul finds its satisfaction in God Himself, the larger its desires become, and the more we take in of Him.

How many of our difficulties are self-created! How the exercise of our *natural* minds upon such a statement as, "filled with all the fulness of God" serves to prevent us from grasping anything of its true import. We need to be much on our guard, lest our mental approach to those words, "filled" and "fulness" be not altogether too gross and carnal—not that we are to evacuate them of all meaning, but rather that we should endeavour to contemplate them spiritually and not materially. Do we not occasion ourselves unnecessary perplexity when we ask, How can the finite contain the Infinite? Are we to think of God, principally and chiefly, as the eternal, infinite, and immutable One? Surely not, for those are His incommunicable attributes, which bear no relation to us, and which qualities we, at best, know next to nothing about. But there are other excellencies of His nature and being which come closer to us; yea, which are communicated to His people. The *final* words concerning Him are: "God is light" and "God is love" (1Jo 1:5; 4:8, 16); and surely, *they* are what we should be most occupied with, and which best enable us to comprehend Him. Cannot the light, which is in God, pour itself into my darkness? Cannot His love be shed abroad in my heart? Filled with all the fulness of God as "Light" and as "Love"!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

10. *The Spies (2:1-3)*

In the second half of chapter 1, the Holy Spirit has recorded the response made by Joshua unto the great commission he had received from the Lord: He complied promptly, he conducted himself according to the Divine Rule, and he acted in faith. The command he issued to his officers (Jos 1:11) showed he had no doubt whatever that the Jordan would be crossed, and his words to the two and a half tribes (Jos 1:15) evinced his full confidence in the Lord's help for the whole campaign. Such language had been both honouring to God and encouraging to His people. We have already seen how the Lord rewarded His servant by constraining the two and a half tribes to accept Joshua as their leader and yield full obedience unto his authority. Those things are recorded for *our* instruction and encouragement—to show that none are ever the losers by trusting in the Lord and rendering obedience to His Word. In what is now to engage our attention, we have a further proof of the Lord showing Himself strong on behalf of the dutiful.

The land which Joshua was called upon to conquer was occupied by a fierce, powerful, and ungodly people. Humanly speaking, there was no reason to conclude that the Canaanites would render assistance or do ought to make his task easier; rather to the contrary, as the attitude and actions of the kings had shown (Num 21:1, 23, 33). When he sent forth the two spies to obtain information about Jericho, he could not naturally expect that any of its inhabitants would render them any help in their difficult task. Yet that is exactly what happened, for those spies received remarkable favour in the eyes of her in whose house they obtained lodgment. Not only was she kindly disposed toward them, but she even hazarded her own life on their behalf. What an illustration was this that “when a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7)! Those two men were in the path of duty, carrying out the orders of God's servant, and He undertook for them.

“And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there” (Jos 2:1). For some time past, the children of Israel had been encamped in the plains of Moab [Shittim], which bordered on the Jordan and lay opposite Jericho (Num 33:49). And now Joshua sent forth these two spies to obtain information about this enemy stronghold, which lay in their path of advance. In so doing, Joshua has been severely criticized by some who regarded him as here acting according to a carnal policy that was dictated by unbelief. They argue that he should have trusted the Lord wholly, and that had he done so, he would have relied upon Him alone, instead of resorting to this device. We do not agree with these fault-finders, for we consider their criticism is entirely unwarranted, arises from their own confusion of mind, and is a most mischievous one.

In the first place, Joshua had a good precedent for acting as he did, for Moses had sent forth spies to view Canaan on a former occasion (Num 13); and Joshua had been Divinely ordered to regulate his conduct by “this book of the law...to do according to all that is written therein” (Jos 1:7-8)—and *that* was one of the things recorded therein! But there are those who say that the suggestion to send forth those first spies proceeded from the unbelief of those who proffered it, and that Moses failed to detect their evil motives. That is indeed the view taken by most writers on the subject; but there is nothing whatever in the Word to support it. Moses declared, “the saying pleased me well” (Deu 1:23); and he made no apology later for his action. The exercise of unbelief appeared in *the sequel*; it was the gloomy report of ten of the spies which expressed unbelief, and the ready credence of that report by the faithless congregation.

Not only is Scripture silent upon any unbelief prompting the sending forth of those twelve spies, but Numbers 13:1-2 expressly informs us, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan”! Nor is there the slightest indication that that was a concession on the Lord's part, or His giving up the people unto their hearts' lusts. Joshua, then, had a good precedent, and a written example to guide him in the sending forth of the two spies. Yet, even had there been neither, so far from his action being reprehensible, it was the exercise of wise prudence and the use of legitimate means. It was his duty to “look before he leaped”—to ascertain the lay-out of Jericho, to discover if there was a weak spot in its defenses, to learn the best point at which to attack and make his plans accordingly. In so doing, he was but discharging his responsibility.

There is much misunderstanding today about the scope of those words, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Pro 3:5), and only too often, fanaticism is confounded with faith. It needs to be clearly insisted upon that the exercise of faith does not preclude the use of all legitimate means, though we are not to rest in the means alone, but rather count upon God's blessing the same. To decline the locking of my doors and the fastening of my windows when there is an epidemic of burglary in the neighbourhood, or to retire for the night and leave a roaring fire in the grate—under the pretext of counting upon God's protecting my property—is not trusting, but *tempting* Him: Should any disagree with that statement, let him carefully ponder Matthew 4:6-7! Faith in God does not preclude the discharge of my performance of duty, both in taking precautions against danger, or using proper means for success.

Joshua was no more actuated by unbelief in sending forth those spies than Oliver Cromwell (1599-1659), as when he bade his men, "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry!" Faith does not release us from our natural obligations. As yet, Joshua knew not that the Lord had purposed that Jericho would fall without Israel having to fight for it. It was some time later when He revealed to His servant that this stronghold of the Canaanites would be overthrown without Israel's army making any direct assault upon it. The secret will of God was in nowise the Rule for Joshua to order his actions by. He was to do according to all that was "written" in the Scriptures; and thus, it is for us: Our responsibility is measured by the Word—not by God's decrees, nor the inward promptings of His Spirit. As Israel's leader, it was Joshua's duty to learn all he could about Jericho and its surroundings before he advanced upon it—Luke 14:31 illustrates the principle for which we are here contending.

"And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went" (Jos 2:1). In view of his own earlier experience (Num 13), there is good reason to believe that Joshua made a careful selection on this occasion and chose men of faith, courage, and prudence. We are, therefore, justified in concluding that ere those spies set out on their dangerous venture, they first sought unto the Lord, committed themselves and their cause into His hands, and asked Him to graciously give them success in the same. If such were the case—and it would be uncharitable to suppose otherwise—then they received fulfilment of that promise, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa 65:24). Ere those two men set out on their mission, the Lord had gone before them, preparing their way, by raising up a brave and staunch friend in the person of her in whose house they took refuge. How often has the writer—and probably the reader too—met with just such a blessed experience!

"And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there" (Jos 2:1). They were Divinely directed to that particular house, though it is not likely they were personally conscious of the fact at the first. God's providence acts silently and secretly, by working in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13). Those spies acted quite freely, by their own volition, yet their steps were "ordered by the LORD" (Psa 37:23). The house in which they sheltered was owned by a harlot, named Rahab—not that she was still plying her evil trade, but that formerly, she had been a woman of ill fame, the stigma of which still clung to her. As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, "Simon the leper (Mat 26:6) though cleansed from his leprosy, wore the reproach of it in his name as long as he lived: so 'Rahab the harlot,' and she is so called in the New Testament, where both her faith and her good works are praised."

"And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country" (Jos 2:2). Since it must have been known unto all in Jericho that the hosts of Israel had been encamped for some months on the opposite side of the Jordan, a keen watch had doubtless been kept on all their movements, and the entry of the two spies had therefore been observed. Even when we have committed ourselves and our cause unto God, and are in the path of duty, we have no right to expect that we shall be exempted from trials, and that all will be smooth sailing. So long as Christians are left in a world which lieth in the Wicked one (1Jo 5:19)—and is therefore hostile unto true godliness—they may look for opposition. Why so? Why does God permit such? That their graces may be tested and developed, evidencing whether they be real or fancied; and if the former, bringing forth fruit to the glory of their Author.

Had He so pleased, the Lord could have prevented the discovery of those spies in Jericho. Had He not done so in the case of the twelve men sent forth by Moses? From Numbers 13, it appears that they made an extensive survey of Canaan, and returned to report unto Israel without their enemies being aware of what

had occurred. But God does not act uniformly, varying His methods as seems best in His sight. That not only exemplifies His own sovereignty, but keeps us in more complete dependence upon Him, not knowing whether His interposition on our behalf will come in one way or in another, from this direction or from that. No, even though those two men were under His immediate guidance and protection, He permitted their entry into Jericho to become known. Nor were they the losers by that; instead, they were granted a manifestation of God's power to deliver them from a horrible death.

In more than one respect is it true that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luk 16:8): A case in point is here before us. Does not the wise precaution taken by these Canaanites put most of us to shame! Are not the wicked much keener in looking after their interests than the righteous are? Are not unbelievers much more on the alert against what would be disastrous to their prospects than the saints are? The Christian ought ever to be on his guard, watching for the approach of any enemy. But is he? Alas, no; and that is why Satan so often succeeds in gaining an advantage over him. It was while men slept that Satan sowed his tares (Mat 13:25); and it is when we become slack and careless that the Devil trips us up. We must "watch" as well as "pray" if we would "enter not into temptation" (Mat 26:41). Let those who have access to John Bunyan's (1628-1688) works read his *Holy War*.¹

There is yet another line of truth which is illustrated here, and which we do well to heed. A careful and constant watch—by "night" as well as by day!—had evidently been set; yet notwithstanding the same, the two spies succeeded in obtaining an entrance into Jericho! "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa 127:1) was strikingly exemplified on this occasion. And what is the spiritual application of that unto *us*?—this should ever be what exercises our hearts as we read and ponder God's Word. Is not the answer found in the verse just quoted above: Since watchfulness—as well as prayer—be necessary if we are to avoid temptation, equally indispensable is prayerfulness, as well as watchfulness. No matter how alert and vigilant *we* be, unless *God's* assistance be humbly, earnestly, and trustfully sought, all our efforts will be in vain. "Commit thy way unto the LORD; *trust also* in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psa 37:5).

Viewing this detail from a higher standpoint, may we not also see here a demonstration of that truth. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, *that* shall stand" (Pro 19:21). It was so here: The king of Jericho proposed, but God disposed. He determined to prevent any Israelite from entering his city, but his well-laid plans came to naught. When the Lord sets before us an open door, "no man can shut it" (Rev 3:8), and *He* set before those two spies an open door into Jericho; and it was utterly futile for any man to endeavour to keep them out. Equally true is it that when the Lord "shut-teth, . . . no man openeth" (Rev 3:7), yet God Himself can do so; therefore, it is the privilege and duty of His servant never to accept defeat, but seek the prayers of God's people that He "would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col 4:3).

"*And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country*" (Jos 2:3). If the reader has not already formed the habit of so doing, let him now begin to read such a passage as the one we are considering with the specific object of trying to find something in each verse of practical importance to *himself*—not that which is "deep" and intricate, but what lies on the surface and is obvious to a *thoughtful* reader. Here we may learn an important and needful "lesson" from the action of the king of Jericho. When he was informed that Israel's spies were now in the city, he did not treat the report with either contemptuous scorn or careless unconcern, but believed the same and acted promptly upon it. Well for us if we heed a timely warning, and seek to nip a danger while it is still in the bud. If we do not heed the first alarms of conscience, but instead trifle with temptation, a fall is sure to follow; and the allowance of one sin leads to the formation of an evil habit.

Changing our angle of meditation, let us contemplate the effect upon the two spies of the demand made upon Rahab by the king's officers. If she complied with their peremptory order and delivered her guests into their hands, then—humanly speaking—they could hope for no other treatment than what has always been meted out unto captured spies. Imagine the state of their minds as they listened intently—which doubtless they did—to that ominous command. Remember they were men of like passions unto ourselves; would they not, then, be filled with perturbation and consternation? Up to this point, things had gone

¹ *Holy War* – the Christian allegorical masterpiece telling of the wicked prince Diabolis leading a rebellion in the city of Man-soul, only to be conquered by Emmanuel in retaking the city, showing grace to its faithful inhabitants and judgment to its many rebels, and rededicating it to the rightful Great King. Available for worldwide download from the www.mountzion.org website.

smoothly for them, but now all seemed lost. Would they not ask themselves, Did we do the right thing after all in taking shelter in this house? Ah, have we not, too, passed through some similar experience? We entered upon what we believed was a certain course of duty, committed the same unto God, and sought His blessing. At first, all went well, His smile appeared to be upon us, and then a crises occurred which seemed to spell sure defeat. Faith must be tested, patience have her perfect work.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

12b. Its Evidences

4. Consider your *occupation with Christ* and remember that growth in grace is commensurate with your growing in the knowledge of Him (2Pe 3:18). That knowledge is indeed a spiritual one, yet it is received via the understanding, for what is not apprehended by the mind cannot profit the heart. Nothing but an increasing familiarity and closer fellowship with Christ can nourish the soul and promote spiritual prosperity. There can be no real progress without a better acquaintance with His person, office, and work. Christianity is more than a creed, more than a system of ethics, more than a devotional programme. It is a *life*: a life of faith on Christ, of communion with Him, and conformity to Him (Phi 1:21). Take Christ out of Christianity and there is nothing left. There must be constant renewed acts of faith on Christ, yet our faith is always in proportion to the spiritual knowledge we have of its object. "That I may know him" precedes "and the power of his resurrection" (Phi 3:10). Christ revealed to the heart is the Object of our knowledge (2Co 4:6), and our spiritual knowledge of Him consists in the concepts and apprehensions of Him which are formed in our minds. That knowledge is fed, strengthened, and renewed by our spiritual and believing meditations on Christ, and those being made effectual in the soul by the power of the Spirit.

The Object of our faith is a known Christ, and the better we know Him, the more we shall act faith on Him. The Christian life consists, essentially, in living on Christ: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). The particular acts of this life of faith are beholding Christ (as He is presented in the Word), cleaving to Him, making use of Him, drawing from Him, holding free communion with Him, delighting ourselves in Him. Alas, the great majority of Christians seek to live on *themselves* and feed on their experience. Some are forever occupied with their corruptions and failures, while others are wholly taken up with their graces and attainments. But there is nothing of *Christ* in either the one or the other, and nothing of faith; rather does self absorb them and a life of sense predominates. All genuine "experience" is knowing ourselves to be what God has described us in His Word, and having such an inward realization thereof as proves to us our dire need of Christ. It consists, too, of such a knowledge of Him as that He is exactly suited to our case and Divinely qualified and perfectly fitted for our every lack. No matter how "deep" may be your "experience," it is worth nothing, unless it turns you to the great Physician.

How often have we read in the diaries and biographies of saints, or heard them say, "O what blessed enlargement of soul I was favoured with, what liberty in prayer, how my heart was melted before the Lord, what joy unspeakable possessed me." But if those "mountain-top experiences" be analyzed, what do they consist of? What is there of *Christ* in them? It is not spiritual views of Him which engages their attention, but the warmth of *their* affections, a being carried away with their comforts. No wonder such ecstasies are so brief and are followed by deep depression of spirits. Measure your spiritual growth rather by the extent you are learning to look away from both sinful self and religious self. Christian progress is to be gauged not by feelings, but by the extent to which you live outside of yourself and live upon Christ—making fuller use of Him, prizing Him more highly, finding all your springs in Him, making Him your "all" (Col 3:11). It is a consciousness of sin and not of our graces, the burden of our corruptions and not delighting ourselves in our enlargements, which will move us to look away from self and behold the Lamb.

5. Consider the *path of obedience* and what progress you are making therein. That which distinguishes the regenerate in a practical way from the unregenerate is that the former are "obedient children" (1Pe 1:14), whereas the latter are entirely dominated by the carnal mind, which is "enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). The very first criterion given in the epistle which is written in order that believers may know they have eternal life is, "Hereby we do know [are Divinely assured] that we know him [savingly], if we keep his commandments" (1Jo 2:3). Conversion is a forsaking of the path of self-will and self-pleasing (Isa 53:6) and a complete surrender of myself to the Lordship of Christ, and the genuineness thereof is evidenced by my taking His yoke upon me and submitting to His authority. If we truly submit to His authority, then we shall seek to comply with all He enjoins and not pick and choose between His precepts. Nothing less than whole-hearted and impartial obedience is required from us (Joh 15:14). If we do not sincerely endeavour to obey in *all* things, then we do not in *any*,

but merely select what is agreeable to ourselves. Then is there any such thing as *progress in obedience*? Yes.

We are improving in obedience when it becomes *more extensive*. Though the young convert has fully surrendered himself to the Lord, yet he devotes himself to some duties with more earnestness and diligence than he does to others; but as he becomes better acquainted with God's will, more of his ways are regulated thereby. As spiritual light increases, he discovers that God's commandment is "exceeding broad" (Psa 119:96), forbidding not only the overt act, but all that leads to it, and inculcating (by necessary implication) the opposite grace and virtue. Growth in grace appears when my obedience is *more spiritual*. One learning to write becomes more painstaking, so that he forms his letters with greater accuracy; so as one progresses in the school of Christ, he pays more attention to that word, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts *diligently*" (Psa 119:4). So, too, superior aims and motives prompt him: His springs are less servile and more evangelical, his obedience proceeding from love and gratitude. That, in turn, produces another evidence of growth: Obedience becomes easier and pleasanter, so that his "delight is in the law of the LORD" (Psa 1:2). Duty is now a joy: "O how love I thy law!" (Psa 119:97).

6. Consider the *privilege of prayer* and how far you are improving in that exercise. Probably not a few will exclaim, "Alas, in this respect, I have deteriorated, for I am neither as diligent in it, nor as fervent as I used to be." But it is easy to form a wrong judgment upon the matter, measuring it by quantity instead of quality. Devout Jews and Papists spend much time on their knees, but that is simply the religion of the flesh. There is often more of the natural than the spiritual in the devotional exercises of the young convert, especially if he be of a warm and ardent temperament. It is easy for enthusiasm to carry him away when new objects and interests engage him, and for emotionalism to be mistaken for fervour of spirit. Personally, we very much doubt if the Lord's people experience any true progress in their prayer life, until they make the humbling discovery they know not how to *pray*, though they may have attained to considerable proficiency in framing eloquent and moving petitions as men judge. "We [Christians!] *know not* what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26): Did we realise that in our spiritual childhood? The first mark of growth here is when we are moved to cry, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luk 11:1).

As the Christian grows in grace, prayer becomes more of an attitude than an act, an act of dependence upon and confidence in God. It becomes an instinct to turn to Him for help, guidance, wisdom, and strength. It consists of an increasing looking to and leaning upon Him, acknowledging Him in all our ways. Thus, prayer becomes more mental than vocal, more ejaculatory than studied, more frequent than prolonged. As the Christian progresses, his prayers will be more spiritual: He will be more intent upon the pursuit of holiness than of knowledge, he will be more concerned about pleasing God than ascertaining whether his name be written in the Book of Life, more earnest in seeking those things which will promote the Divine glory than minister to his comfort. As he learns to know God better, his confidence in Him will be deepened, so that if on the one hand, he knows nothing is too hard for Him; on the other, he is assured that His wisdom will withhold, as well as bestow. Again, growth appears when we are as diligent in praying for the whole Household of Faith, as for yourself or immediate family. Our heart has been enlarged when we make "supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18).

7. Consider the *Christian warfare* and what success you are having therein. Here again, we shall certainly err and draw a wrong conclusion, unless we pay close attention to the language of Holy Writ. That which we are called to engage in is "the good fight of *faith*" (1Ti 6:12), but if we seek to gauge our progress therein by the testimony of our *senses*, a false verdict will inevitably be given. The faith of God's elect has the Scriptures for its sole ground and Christ as its immediate Object. Nowhere in Scripture has Christ promised His redeemed such a victory over their corruptions in this life that they shall be slain, nor even that they will be so subdued their lusts will cease vigorously opposing; no, not for a season, for there is no discharge nor furlough in this warfare. Nay, He may permit your enemies to gain such a temporary advantage that you cry "iniquities prevail against me" (Psa 65:3); nevertheless, you are to *continue resisting*, assured by the Word of promise, you shall yet be an overcomer. Satan's grand aim is to drive you to *despair*, because of the prevelancy of your corruptions; but Christ has prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and proof His prayer is being answered is that you weep over your failures and do not become a total apostate.

8. The trouble is that we want to mix something with faith—our feelings, our "experiences," or the fruits of faith. Faith is to look to Christ and triumph in Him alone. It is to be engaged with Him and His Word at all times, no matter what we encounter. If we endeavour to ascertain the outcome of this fight by

the evidence of our senses—what we see and feel within—instead of judging it by faith, then our present experience will be that of Peter's "when he saw the wind boisterous" (Mat 14:30) while walking on the sea toward Christ; or we will conclude, "I shall now perish" (1Sa 27:1). Did not Paul find that when he would do good, evil was present within him; yea, that while he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, he *saw* another law in his members warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity, so that he cried, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24). *That* was his "experience," and the evidence of sense. Ah, but he did not, as so many do, stop there: "Who shall deliver me...? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:24-25), he answered. *That* was the language of *faith*! Is it yours? Your success in this fight is to be determined by whether—despite all failures—you are continuing therein and whether you confidently look forward to the final issue—that you *will* triumph through Christ.

If we received a letter from a native of Greenland's icy mountains asking us to give him as accurate and vivid a word picture as possible of an English apple-tree and its fruit, we would not single out for our description one that had been artificially raised in a hothouse, nor would we select one which grew in poor and rocky ground on some desolate hill-side; rather would we take on that was to be found in average soil in a typical orchard. It is quite true the others would be apple trees and might bear fruit, yet if we confined our word picture unto the portraying of either of them, the Greenlander would not obtain a fair concept of the ordinary apple tree. It is equally unfair and misleading to take the peculiar experiences of any particular Christian and hold them up as the standard by which all others should measure themselves. There are many kinds of apples, differing in size, colour, and flavour. And though Christians have certain fundamental things in common, yet, no two of them are alike in all respects. Variety marks all the works of God. Above, we have referred to seven different phases of the Christian life by which we may test our progress. In what follows, we mention some of the characteristics which pertain more or less—for in germ form, they are found in all—to a state of Christian *maturity*.

Prudence. There is a well-known adage—though often ignored by adults—that "we cannot put old heads on young shoulders." That is true spiritually, as well as naturally. We live and learn, though some learn more readily than others—usually it is because they receive *their* instruction from the Scriptures, while others are informed only by painful experience. The Word says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psa 146:3); and if we heed that injunction, we are spared many a bitter disappointment; whereas, if we take people at their word and count on their help, we shall frequently find that we leaned upon a broken reed. In many other ways, the young convert's zeal becomes tempered by knowledge, and he conducts himself more prudently. As he becomes more experienced, he learns to act with greater caution and circumspection, and to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (Col 4:5), as he also discovers the chilling effects which frothy professors have upon him, so that he is more particular in selecting his associates. He learns, too, his own peculiar weaknesses, and in which direction he needs most to watch and pray against temptations.

Sobriety. This can be attained unto only in the school of Christ. It is true that in certain dispositions, there is much less to oppose this virtue; yet its full development can only be under the operations of Divine grace, as Titus 2:11-12 plainly shows. We would define Christian sobriety as the regulation of our appetites and affections in their pursuit and use of all things—we can be righteous "over much" (Ecc 7:16). It is the governing of our inward and outward man by the rules of moderation and temperance. It is the keeping of our desires within due bounds, so that we are preserved from excesses in practice. It is a frame or temper of the mind which is the opposite of excitedness. It is a being "temperate in *all things*" (1Co 9:25)—and that includes our opinions, as well as conduct. It is a holy seriousness, calmness, gravity, and balance, which prevents one becoming an extremist. It is that self-control which keeps us from being unduly cast down by sorrows, or elated by joys. It causes us to hold the things of this life with a light hand, so that neither the pleasures, nor the cares of the world unduly affect the heart.

Stability. There is a spiritual childishness, as well as a natural one, wherein the young convert acts more from impulse than principle, is carried away by his fancies, and easily influenced by those around him. To be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14) is one of the characteristics of spiritual immaturity; and when we waver in faith and are of a doubtful mind, then we halt and falter in our duties. Even that love which is shed abroad in the hearts of the renewed needs to be controlled and guided, as appears from that petition of the apostle's, "I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9). As the Christian grows in grace, he becomes "rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith" (Col 2:7). As he grows in the knowledge of the

Lord, it can be said of him, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD" (Psa 112:7). He may be shaken, but will not be shattered by bad news, for having learned to rely upon God, he knows no change of circumstances can do more than lightly affect him. No matter what may befall him, he will remain calm, confident in his Refuge: Since his heart be anchored in God, his comforts do not ebb and flow with the creature.

Patience. Here we must distinguish between that natural placidity which marks some temperaments, and that spiritual grace which is wrought in the Christian by God. We must also remember that spiritual patience has both a passive and an active side to it. Passively, it is quiet and contented resignation under suffering (Luk 21:19), being the opposite of acting "as a wild bull in a net" (Isa 51:20). Its language is "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (Joh 18:11). Actively, it is persevering in duty (Heb 12:1)—being the opposite of turning back "in the day of battle" (Psa 78:9). Its language is "be not weary in well doing" (2Th 3:13). Patience enables the believer to meekly bear whatever the Lord is pleased to lay upon him. It causes the believer to quietly await God's hour of relief or deliverance. It prompts the believer to continue performing his duty, in spite of all opposition and discouragement. Now, since it is tribulation (Rom 5:3) and the trying of our faith (Jam 1:3) which "worketh patience," much of it is not to be looked for in the spiritually inexperienced and immature. We are improving in patience when more spiritual considerations prompt us thereto.

Humility. Evangelical humility is a realization of my ignorance, incompetency and vileness, with an answerable frame of heart. As the young believer applies himself diligently to the reading of God's Word and acquires more familiarity with its contents, as he becomes better instructed in the Faith, he is very apt to be puffed up with his knowledge. But as he studies the Word more deeply, he perceives how much there is therein which transcends his understanding; and as he learns to distinguish between an intellectual information of spiritual things and an experimental and transforming knowledge of them, he cries, "That which I see not teach thou me" (Job 34:32) and "teach me thy statutes" (Psa 119:12). As he grows in grace, he makes an increasing discovery of his ignorance and realises, "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1Co 8:2). As the Spirit enlarges his desires, he thirsts more and more for holiness; and the more he is conformed to the image of Christ, the more will he groan because of his sensible unlikeness to Him. The young Christian attempts to perform many duties in his own strength, but later on discovers that apart from Christ, he can do nothing (Joh 15:5). The father in Christ is self-emptied and self-abased and marvels increasingly at the longsufferance of God toward him.

Forbearance. A spirit of bigotry, partisanship, and intolerance is a mark of narrow-mindedness and of spiritual immaturity. On first entering the school of Christ, most of us expected to find little difference between members of the same Family; but more extensive acquaintance with them taught us better—for we found their minds varied as much as their countenances, their temperaments more than their local accents of speech, and that amid general agreement, there were wide divergences of opinions and sentiments in many things. While all God's people are taught of Him, yet they know but "in part"—and the "part" one knows may not be the part which another knows. All the saints are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet He does not operate uniformly in them, nor bestow identical gifts (1Co 12:8-11). Thus, opportunity is afforded us to forbear "one another in love" (Eph 4:2) and not make a man an offender for a word, or despise those who differ from me. Growth in grace is evidenced by a spirit of clemency and toleration, granting to others the same right of private judgment and liberty as I claim for myself. The mature Christian, generally, will subscribe to that axiom, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

Contentment. As a spiritual virtue, this is to have our desires limited by a present enjoyment, or to find a sufficiency in and be satisfied with my immediate portion. It is the opposite of murmurings, distracted cares, and covetous desires. To murmur is to quarrel with the dispensations of providence; to have distracted cares is to distrust God for the future; to have covetous desires is to be dissatisfied with what God has assigned me. God knows what is best for our good; and the more that be realised, the more thankful shall we be for the allotments of His love and wisdom—pleased with what pleases Him. Contentment is a mark of weanedness from the world and of delighting ourselves in the Lord. The apostle declared, "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phi 4:11); and as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) said, that lesson was learned "not at the feet of Gamaliel, but of Christ." Nor was it something he acquired there all in a moment. By nature, we are restless, impatient, envious of the condition of others; but submission to the Divine will and confidence in God's goodness produces peace of mind and rest of heart.

It is the mature Christian who can say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Psa 4:7).

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

10b. Its Results

4. *Brought into God's favour.* By nature and by practice, Christians were "the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3), being under the curse of the Law—all the threatenings of God in full force against them. But condemnation, awful as it is, is not damnation—the sentence is not yet executed, and until it is, it is not irrevocable. But once the sinner savingly believes in Christ, he stands in a new relation to God as Lawgiver and Judge: He is no longer under the condemning power of the Law, but is "under grace" (Rom 6:14). As the manslayer was—on having entered the city of refuge by a special constitution of mercy—secure from the avenger of blood (Num 35:12), so the sinner who has "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18) in the Gospel is—by the gracious constitution of God—forever secured from the curse. All the threatenings which hitherto belonged to him, no longer stand against him, but are reckoned by the Judge of all, as having been executed on his Substitute who was made a curse for His people. But more: The *favour* of God's Divine blessing is now his status and portion.

When Christ reconciled the Church unto God, He did more than put away her sins and avert the judicial wrath of God: He re-instated her in God's favour and opened the way for the full manifestation of His love unto her. The two things are clearly distinguished in Colossians 1:20: "Having *made peace* through the blood of his cross, by him *to reconcile* all things unto himself" As we have so often pointed out in these articles, "reconciliation" consists of two things: The removal of enmity, and the restoring of amity—the two parts of Christ's mediatorial work, respectively, effecting them. His bloodshedding, or enduring the curse of the Law; removing the enmity, or "making peace." His obedience to the Law, or bringing in "an everlasting righteousness"; procuring the reward, and entitling unto the Divine blessing. The shedding of Christ's atoning blood obtained for His people the remission or pardon of their sins: His meritorious obedience secured for them the justification of their persons in the high court of Heaven, or their admittance into God's judicial favour.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom *also* we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom 5:1-2). As we pointed out in our last, "peace with God" refers not to a subjective experience, but to an objective fact; that it signifies not tranquillity of soul, but a relation to the Lawgiver. Hostilities between the Divine Judge and His believing people have ceased: His sword of justice is sheathed, and therefore, they no longer have cause to dread His vengeance. But that is more or less a negative thing: There is something else, something positive, something more blessed. That additional benefit is introduced in Romans 5:2 by the word "also." Suppose that one of the nobles of the land, who stood high at court and enjoyed special privileges from his sovereign, should commit some great offence against the throne; in fact, turn traitor. We can imagine that, in his clemency, the king might pardon the offender upon the acknowledgement of his crime and his suing for mercy, but we can scarcely conceive of the monarch restoring his subject to the intimacy and privileges he formerly enjoyed. Yet *that* is what Christ has done—restored apostate traitors to the full favour of God.

"By whom *also* we have access by faith into this grace wherein *we stand*" (Rom 5:2). Christ has not only brought us into a legal state wherein we are secure from God's wrath, but into one of intimate friendship and fellowship with Him. It is indeed a great mercy that God has ceased to be offended with us, that He will never inflict any penal punishment upon us; but it is a far greater and grander blessing that He should regard us with pleasure and pour blessings upon us. "By whom *also* we have access" implies that by nature, we did not; and that by our own efforts, we could not. Previous to conversion, our standing was in disgrace; but now, we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6)—or as it might more literally be rendered, "graced in the beloved." Christ has reinstated His people in the good will and perfect acceptance of God: "This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1Pe 5:12). We stand in the full favour of God, with not a single cloud between us.

By the mediatorial work of Christ, the believer has full right of approach to the Divine mercy seat, to gaze upon the face of a reconciled God, to dwell in His glorious presence forevermore. For this is no transient blessing which the obedience and bloodshedding of Christ has procured for His people, but a permanent and unalienable one. It is not only that they are admitted into God's favour, but it is "this grace wherein *we stand*" (Rom 5:2)—wherein ye are eternally settled and established. It is not only that God will never again be at judicial enmity against them, but that He is forever their Friend. The blessings which Chr-

ist has obtained for His redeemed are no contingent or evanescent ones— for they are dependent upon nothing whatever in or from *them*, but are the unforfeitable procurements of His infinitely-meritorious righteousness. And therefore, has the Father made a covenant-promise to His Son concerning those He transacted for: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer 32:40). We have been received into the most cordial good will and everlasting favour of the Father.

5. *Given access to God.* The very first message from Heaven after the advent of the Prince of peace revealed the purpose for which the Son had become incarnate and made known what He would accomplish from His mission: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:13-14). That brief word contained a broad outline of the whole subject of reconciliation. First, it declared that the glory of God was its grand design, for that ever takes precedence of all other considerations. Second, it proclaimed that the issue of it would be peace on earth—not “in the earth,” but a revolted province restored to fealty. Third, it announced—as the “and” connecting the first and second clauses shows—that God’s glory and the good of His people go hand in hand: Though He would show Himself a Friend to them, yet He would conserve His own interests and maintain His own honour. Fourth, it published the grand outcome: “Good will toward men” (Luk 2:14)—they brought into God’s favour. The final clause may also be rendered, “good will *among* men”—Jew and Gentile made one!

Now, no sooner had the Peacemaker exemplified God’s holiness, magnified His law, and pacified His wrath—thereby glorifying Him to the superlative degree—than we are told: “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Mat 27:51). That was a parable in action, and one possessed of profound spiritual significance. There were several other remarkable phenomena which immediately followed the death of Christ, but the Holy Spirit has placed first the rending of the temple veil. He calls our attention to that miraculous happening with the word, “Behold”—bidding us pause and consider this marvel, be awed by it, amazed over it. That “veil” was a magnificent curtain hung between the holy place and the holy of holies, separating the one from the other, barring an entrance into the innermost chamber and shutting out from view its holy furniture from the sight of those in the second compartment. It was rent asunder at the moment Christ expired. Immediately, the soul and spirit were separated from Christ’s body, an invisible hand separated the veil.

Amazing synchronization was that! Christ was the true Tabernacle or Temple (Joh 1:14); and therefore, when His flesh was rent (Heb 10:20), there was an answering rending of the structure which typed forth His flesh. Well may we reverently inquire, “*What* was signified thereby?” First, though subordinately, it signified a revelation of the Old Testament mysteries. The veil of the temple was for *concealment*. Out of all the congregation of Israel, only one man was ever permitted to enter the holy of holies; and he did but once a year, and then in a cloud of incense—symbolizing the darkness of that dispensation. But now, by the death of Christ, all is laid open: The shadows give place to the substance; the mysteries are unveiled. Second, and dispensationally, the uniting of Jew and Gentile by the removal of the partition wall—the ceremonial law (Eph 2:14-15)—which had separated them. But third, and chiefly, that a new and living way had been opened unto God: The rending of the veil opened the door into the holiest, where He abode between the cherubim. The rending of the veil signified and announced free access unto God.

First, for Christ Himself. During the three hours of darkness, the Redeemer was cut off from God. But when the veil was rent, there was an anticipation of what is recorded in Hebrews 9:11-12. Though Christ did not officially enter Heaven till forty days after His resurrection, yet He acquired the right to enter immediately (as our Surety) when He cried, “It is finished” (Joh 19:30), and had a virtual admission. Therein, we may perceive the conformity between the Head and the members of His Body: The moment a sinner savingly believes in Christ, he has a title to enter heaven, yet he has to wait his appointed time, ere he does so in the fullest sense. Second, for the redeemed. Christ has procured an entrance for them in Spirit, and by faith even now: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Heb 10:19-20). We have free access to the throne of grace. “For through him [Christ] we both [believing Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).

It was sin which estranged us from the Holy One. Upon his first transgression, Adam was driven out of paradise. The whole congregation of Israel at Sinai were commanded to keep their distance. The unclean in Israel were debarred from the camp and tabernacle. By so many different emblems did the Lord signify that sin had obstructed our access to Him. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made

nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13), because His blood put away our sins. The efficacy of His sacrifice and the virtue of His meritorious obedience conferred upon His believing people the right to draw near unto God. All legal distance is removed: Reconciliation has been effected; access to God is their consequent privilege and right. What a wonder of wonders is this!—that one who is by nature a depraved creature may, by grace and through the Mediator, not only approach unto God without servile fear, but may have blessed fellowship with Him. To come into His very presence as a consciously-accepted worshipper is the distinguishing blessing of Christianity, in contrast from Judaism, Romanism, and all false religions.

6. Endowed with the *sanctifying gifts of the Spirit*. "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). The mighty work of the Spirit in us is as indispensable as the meritorious work of Christ for us in order to appear before God as acceptable worshippers. As it is by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, we have the *title* of access to God, so it is by the regenerating and sanctifying operations of the Spirit, we have personal *meetness* for the same. That was typed out of old under the Mosaic economy. Those who drew near unto Jehovah in the services of His house were required to have not only the consecrating blood applied to their persons, but to be sprinkled with the anointing oil (Lev 8:24, 30). Three things are required if we are to worship God aright: There must be knowledge in the understanding, that we may be informed of what God approves and accepts; grace in the heart, so that our communion with Him may be a real and spiritual one—and not merely a bodily and formal one; and strength in the soul for the exercise of faith, love, reverence, and delight. By the Spirit alone are those three essentials imparted.

Now it is from a reconciled God, in virtue of Christ's meritorious work, that we receive the sanctifying Spirit. This is evident from the particular character in which the apostle addressed Deity in the following prayers: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1Th 5:23); "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight" (Heb 13:20-21). The "God of peace" is the pacified and reconciled God, and the blessings which the apostle requested are bestowed, or wrought in us by the Spirit. Christ prayed that His redeemed might be loved as He was loved of the Father (Joh 17:23-26)—not in degree, but in kind; and the sanctifying graces of the Spirit are the tokens and evidences of His love, the manifestations of His heart toward His people. Or, as Thomas Manton (1620-1677) so beautifully expressed it, they are "the jewels of the covenant, wherewith the Spouse of Christ is decked."

Even the regenerate—harassed as they are by indwelling sin and hindered by their infirmities—can no more spiritually approach unto the Father without the gracious operations of the Spirit, than they could without the mediation of Christ: The One supplies the experimental enablement, as the Other has the legal right. The Spirit's operations within us are imperative if our leaden hearts are to be raised above the things of time and sense, if our affections are to flow forth unto their rightful Object, if faith is to be duly acted upon Him, if a sense of His presence is to be felt in our souls. He alone can empower us experimentally to have real fellowship with God, so that He is glorified; and we, edified. How shall we ask for those things which are according to the Divine will, unless the Spirit prompts us (Rom 8:26)? How shall we sing "with grace" in our "hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16) without the Spirit's quickenings? How shall we bring forth fruit to the glory of God without the Spirit energizing us? And our endowment with the Spirit is one of the bestowments—the chief of them—of a reconciled God.

7. *God's acceptance of our services*. Those "services" may be broadly and briefly summed up as our obedience and worship. But says the self-emptied Christian, What can a poor, sinful creature like me possibly offer unto God which would be acceptable unto Him? The proud religionist may boast of his performances and plume his fine feathers, but not so one whose eyes have been anointed by the Spirit, so that he sees himself in God's light. The one who is really "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3) realises not only that his very righteousness as a natural man are as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), but that his most spiritual works as a regenerate man are defective and defiled. How then shall *such* services be received by the Holy One? Some may experience a difficulty at this point and ask, "Since the spiritual works of a Christian are wrought by the Holy Spirit, how can *they* be defiled?" Answer: They are wrought by His agency, and yet are performed by us. The purest water is fouled when it passes through a soiled pipe. The most brilliant lamp is blurred if it shines through a smoky chimney. Thus it is, with what the Spirit produces through us.

But since our obedience and worship are so faulty and polluted, how can God *accept* them? Turn back to the first worshipper on this sin-cursed earth: "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel *and* to his offering" (Gen 4:4). It was by faith that

Abel offered that “excellent sacrifice” (Heb 11:4)—which so blessedly foreshadowed the Lamb of God—and “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering”: The worshipper himself was first accepted, and then his worship! Thus it has been ever since: The person is first taken into God’s favour, and then his services are acknowledged as well-pleasing unto Him. Yet that does not furnish a complete answer to the question: Other types have to be taken note of, if we are to obtain a complete picture. On the forehead of Israel’s high priest was a plate of pure gold bearing the inscription, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” He wore it that he might “bear the *iniquity* of the *holy* things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD” (Exo 28:36-38). Christ bore the defects of our “holy things”; and because of His holiness, God accepts from us whatever is sincere.

“The sinful failings of our best actions are hid and covered: they are not examined by a severe Judge, but accepted by a loving Father” (T. Manton). That is true, but it fails to show *how* the Father is righteously able to act so graciously. It is not because there has been any relating of His holiness or lowering of His standard, but because our Surety made full satisfaction to God’s holiness for the sinful failings of their best actions. But even that is not all, for it is largely negative: Our sincere obedience and reverent worship is accepted by the Father, because the same ascends to God, perfumed with the merits of Christ. In Revelation 8:3, He is seen as the Angel of the Covenant: “And there was given unto him much incense [emblem of His merits], that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints”! Thus it is “by *Him*” that we “offer the sacrifice of praise to God” (Heb 13:15). As those made “priests unto God” (Rev 1:6), we are to “offer up spiritual sacrifices”; and they are “acceptable to God by *Jesus Christ*” (1Pe 2:5)! And they are acceptable, because He has effected a perfect reconciliation between God and the Church.

8. *Our eternal security.* In view of all that has been brought out under the previous heads, there is little need for us to enlarge upon this one. So perfect was the sacrifice which Christ offered to God on behalf of His Church that there is a perpetuity annexed to it: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Its efficacy is of everlasting force, and its merits are imputed to the believer without cessation. Christ made an end of sins, effected reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24). That righteousness is imputed to His people and placed upon them as a robe (Isa 61:10)—and such is its virtue and vitality that it never wears out. But more: The risen Christ now serves continually as the Advocate of His people, pleading His sacrifice on their behalf, and suing out the benefits thereof. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). If while we were the objects of the Divine displeasure, Christ restored us to God’s favour, much more now that we are God’s friends will He obtain pardon for our daily transgressions and secure our final salvation. The life of our risen Saviour is the security of His people: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19).

“Christ is not only the Mediator of reconciliation to *make* our peace, but the Mediator of intercession to *preserve* it. He only took away our sins by His death; He only can preserve our reconciliation by His life. As He suffered effectively by the strength of His Deity to make our peace, so He intercedes in the strength of His merit to preserve peace. He did not only take away, but ‘abolish and slew the enmity’ (Eph 2:15-16). He slew it to make it incapable of living again; and if any sin stands up to provoke justice, He sits as an Advocate to answer the process (1Jo 2:2). As God was in Christ reconciling the world, so He is in Christ giving out the fruits of that reconciliation, not imputing our trespasses unto us. Our constant access to God is by Christ. He sits in Heaven to lead us by the hand unto the Father, as a prince in favour brings a man into the presence of a gracious king” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680). The sum of this—and the grand and infallible conclusion to which it all leads—is that *nothing* “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).

9. *God for us*—loving, providing for, protecting, blessing us. If we have been brought into His favour, and if He be the Ruler of the universe, then what will necessarily follow? This: That He will make “*all* things work together for [our] good” (Rom 8:28). Nay more: “For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas [the Gospel ministry], or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all are yours*; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:21-23). “Christ is God’s” is a relationship based upon the Mediatorial office. To Him, as the rightful Heir, God has given “all things” (Heb 1:2); and by virtue of our relation to Christ, all things are *ours*—relatively, and subject to God’s government for our good.

10. *The beatific vision.* On the Resurrection morning, the body of the believer will be “fashioned like unto his [Christ’s] glorious body” (Phi 3:21); then in spirit, soul, and body, we shall be “like him” (1Jo 3:2), fully and eternally “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son” (Rom 8:29). Then will His prayer receive answer: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may *behold my glory*” (Joh 17:24).

