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STUDIES
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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

Jesus has been “crowned with glory and honour” (Heb 2:9). That the eternal Son of God should sit upon the throne of power presents no difficulty to regenerate minds, but that one in our nature should be exalted to the seat of pre-eminence is a mystery presented to faith’s acceptance. How transcendently amazing that those hands which once were nailed to the cross should now hold the sceptre of universal dominion; that those feet which were once weary and dust-soiled at Jacob’s well, which were washed with a sinful woman’s tears, and kissed in penitential grief and love with polluted lips, should now have *all* things, both in heaven and in earth (Eph 1:21-22), put under them! Yet how blessed to know that that lowly, gentle, compassionate Saviour, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, is possessed of all authority and might, supreme majesty and government, so that He can answer His peoples’ prayers, deliver them from their enemies, support them under their trials, and at last take them to be with Himself forever!

During the days of His humiliation, a veil was drawn over the Saviour’s glory. Yet some rays occasionally broke through, manifesting to attentive spectators His essential and official dignity. The perfect life which He lived, the heavenly doctrine which He taught, the amazing miracles which He performed, proclaimed Him to be none other than the only-begotten Son of God and the promised Redeemer of Israel. At His birth, the angels heralded Him as “Christ, the Lord” (Luk 2:11). At His baptism, the opened heavens, the voice of the Father, and the descent of the Spirit upon Him in the form of a dove, gave witness that He was more than man. The dark scene of His death was illuminated by supernatural phenomena to signify that He was no ordinary sufferer. Even His burial was not without honour, for though He had been put to death in the most ignominious manner, and under the imputation of the greatest of crimes, yet His body was wrapped in fine linen and precious spices by men of high rank and deposited in a new sepulchre.

However, the circumstances called attention to above gave only a partial relief to the deep gloom of self-abasement which had rested upon Christ for thirty-three years. His life, from the manger to the tomb, was via a path of shame and sorrow. It was not until His resurrection that the glory which was to follow His sufferings began to shine forth in unmistakable splendour. Then it was that the character of Christ was vindicated from the aspersions of His enemies. Then it was that the Father openly testified to the Mediator's accomplishment of that work which had been given Him to perform. Then it was that the Lord Jesus obtained eternal redemption for His people, and by rising as their Representative, gave pledge that they too should rise after His example and through His merits and power.

Having finished the work which had been assigned Him by the Father, it was not necessary for the Mediator to prolong His stay upon earth. Rather was it expedient that He should leave it in order to enter into His well-earned reward, that He should perform those benevolent offices by which the benefits of His humiliation and death should be communicated to His people, and in particular, to make way for the coming of another divine person, not in visible form, but in a powerful dispensation of life and light, holiness and consolation. "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (Joh 16:5-7). Accordingly, we read that, after He had given all necessary instructions to His disciples, Christ was parted from them and received up into heaven (Luk 24:51).

"Our Lord ascended in human nature. The man Christ Jesus has left the earth and entered into that invisible region of the universe where God sits on the throne of His majesty. To His followers, it is a source of high consolation to know that He has not laid aside their nature, but retained it amidst His glory, because they can look up to Him with confidence, in the full assurance of His sympathy, and see in His exaltation an earnest of their future glory....As God, He could neither descend or ascend, because His divine essence, filling heaven and earth, cannot change its place and does not admit of that exaltation or that accession of glory which the ascension implies....It was in His assumed nature that He, who had first descended, after ascended that 'He might fill all things,' heaven with His glory, and the earth with the blessings of His grace" (John Dick, 1764-1833).

At His ascension, the Mediator was attended by the heavenly hierarchies, although invisible to human eyes. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men" (Psa 68:17-18). The angelic hosts celebrated Christ's mighty achievements and attested the high dignity of the Victor. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1Pe 3:22). Therefore did they come, on the occasion of His ascending, to do homage to their Lord and top swell His train when He took possession of His kingdom.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Eph 4:8). "Leading captivity" is clearly interpreted for us in Judges 5:12,

where an ancient custom, long observed and well-known in the times of the apostles, is in view. When a victorious general returned home in public triumph, the captives he had taken were led in chains before him, and the richest of the spoils adorned his chariot. Borrowing a figure of speech from this established practice, the apostle pictures our Mediator as the Conqueror of sin, Satan, the world, death, and every spiritual enemy of Himself and His people. He has “spoiled principalities and powers” by releasing many of their victims, and now, “made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15—cf. Luk 11:21-22; Heb 2:14-15)—the expression “captivity captive” is a putting of the abstract for the concrete—“captivity” for “captives,” and that for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that His elect should be freed from their captor, the devil.

From what has been said above, the reader will see that we do not endorse the strange theory which some have advanced, namely, that the souls of the Old Testament saints were *outside* of heaven before Christ’s resurrection, and that not until His ascension were they conducted on High—Hebrews 11:40 at once disposes of such a view. No, we regard Ephesians 4:8 as referring to the Mediator’s triumph over the infernal powers. “They who made men captives, by their successful stratagems, saw the spoils wrested from their hands and were themselves made captive by our Almighty Redeemer. Whether they were compelled to be present, and were exhibited as vanquished foes, disgraced and ruined, and reserved to everlasting punishment, we are not warranted by a single expression, of which no explanation is given, to affirm. (Personally, we believe Col 2:15 justifies this conclusion. AWP). But there is no doubt that our Saviour triumphed over them while He ascended. That in His exaltation to the throne of heaven, they beheld a fearful presage of the final overthrow of their kingdom” (John Dick).

“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mar 16:19). It ought not to be necessary for us to point out that such language as this is figurative, yet in this day of carnalizing spiritual things, it may be well to supply a word of explanation. Neither the “right hand” of God, nor the posture ascribed to our Saviour, can be literally understood. God is pure “Spirit” (Joh 4:24) and has no bodily members. When mention is made of His eyes, ears, feet, hands, we must explain them consistently with the spirituality of His essence, and regard them as metaphors employed to assist us in conceiving His perfections and operations. Although the Mediator in His exaltation has a material body, yet His “sitting” is as figurative as the “right hand” of God. In Acts 7:55, He is pictured as “standing,” and in Revelation 2:1, as He who “*walketh* in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.”

The “right hand” is the place of honour (Gen 48:14; 1Ki 2:19; Psa 80:17). Christ’s being seated at God’s right hand is expressive of His exaltation, of the glory which has been conferred upon Him, of His official dignity. It also denotes the possession of supreme happiness (Psa 16:11), and of invincible might (Mat 26:64). It is God’s answer to the prayer of His incarnate Son, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Joh 17:5). The humanity of Christ has been elevated high above all creatures. He is “the Firstborn [entitled to the *double* portion] among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Angels adore Him and the saints will cast their crowns before His throne. All heaven will yet cry, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and

blessing” (Rev 5:12). In the meantime, it is ours to love, serve, and worship Him with all our hearts, and to count upon Him for the supply of our every need.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

56. The Excellency of Faith (11:1-3)

Ere we take up the contents of the 11th chapter, let us briefly review the ground already covered. Chapters 1 and 2 are more or less introductory in their character. In them, the wondrous *person* of the God-man Mediator is presented to our view as superior to the Old Testament prophets and as excelling the angels. The first main division of the Epistle commences at 3:1 and runs to the end of 4:15 and treats of the *mission* of Christ. This is seen to surpass that of either Moses or Joshua, for neither of them led the people into the real rest of God. The section is followed by a practical application in 4:16. The second principal division begins with 5:1 and extends to 10:18, and deals with the *priesthood* of Christ. This is shown to transcend the Aaronic in dignity, efficacy, and permanency. The section is followed by a practical application contained in 10:19 to 12:29. The closing chapter forms a conclusion to the Epistle.

“The general nature of this Epistle, as unto the kind of writing, is paranetical or hortatory, which is taken from its end and design. The exhortation proposed is to constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the profession of the Gospel against temptations and persecutions. Both these the Hebrews had to conflict with in their profession—the one from the Judaical church-state itself, the other from the members of it. Their temptations to draw back and forsake their profession arose from the consideration of the Judaical church-state and Mosaic ordinances of worship, which they were called by the Gospel to relinquish. The divine institution of that state, with its worship, the solemnity of the covenant whereon it was established, the glory of its priesthood, sacrifices, and other divine ordinances (Rom 9:4), with their efficacy for acceptance with God, were continually proposed unto them and pressed on them, to allure and draw them off from the Gospel. And the trial was very great after the inconsistency of the two states was made manifest. This gave occasion to the whole *doctrinal* part of the Epistle, the exposition of which, by divine grace and assistance, we have passed through. For therein declaring the nature, use, end, and signification of all divine institutions under the Old Testament, and allowing unto them all the glory and efficacy which they could pretend unto, the writer of this Epistle declares from the Scripture itself that the state of the Gospel church, in its high-priest, sacrifice, covenant, worship, privileges, and efficacy is incomparably to be preferred above that of the Old Testament. Yea, that all the excellency and glory of that state, and all that belonged unto it, consisted only in the representation that was made thereby of the greater glory of Christ and the Gospel, without which they were of no use, and therefore ruinous or pernicious to be persisted in.

“After he had fixed their minds in the truth and armed them against the temptations, which they were continually exposed to, the apostle proceeds to the second means, whereby their steadiness and constancy in the profession of the Gospel, which he exhorted them unto, was already assaulted with greater force and fury. This arose from the opposition which befell them and from the persecutions of all sorts that they had endured, and were still likely to undergo, for their faith in Christ Jesus with the profession thereof and observance of the holy worship ordained in the Gospel. This they suffered from the obstinate *members* of the Jewish church, as they did the other (temptation) from the *state* of that church itself. An account hereof the apostle enters upon in the close of the foregoing chapter and withal declares unto them the only way and means on their part whereby they may be preserved and kept constant in their profession, notwithstanding all the evils that might befall them therein, and this is by faith alone. From their *temptations* they were delivered by the *doctrine* of the truth, and from the *opposition* made unto them by *faith* in exercise” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

The particular character of the section begun at 10:19 is not difficult to ascertain. It is addressed to our responsibility. This is at once evident in the “Let us” of 10:22, 23, 24. In 10:32-36, there is a call to patient waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises. Nothing but real faith in the veracity of the Promiser can sustain the heart and prompt to steady endurance during a protracted season of trial and suffering. Hence in 10:38, the apostle quotes the striking word from Habakkuk, “The just shall live *by faith*” (Hab 2:4). That sentence really forms the text of which Hebrews 11 is the sermon. The central design of this chapter is to evidence the *patience* of those who, in former ages, endured by faith before they received the fulfillment of God’s promises. Note particularly verses 13 and 39.

“Whosoever made this (verse 1) the beginning of the eleventh chapter, has unwisely disjointed the context, for the object of the apostle was to prove what he had already said—that there is need of patience. He had quoted the testimony of Habakkuk, who says that the just lives by faith, he now shows what remained to be proved—that faith can be no more separated from patience than from itself. The order then of what he says is this, ‘We shall not reach the goal of salvation except we have patience, for the prophet declares that the just lives by faith, but faith directs us to things afar off which we do not as yet enjoy. It then necessarily includes patience.’ Therefore, the minor proposition in the argument is this, ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for’” (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

“The apostle now, for the illustration and enforcement of his exhortation, brings forward a great variety of instances, from the history of former ages, in which *faith* had enabled individuals to perform very difficult duties, endure very severe trials, and obtain very important blessings. The principles of the apostle’s exhortation are plainly these: ‘They who turn back, turn back unto perdition. It is only they who persevere in believing that obtain the salvation of the soul. Nothing but a persevering faith can enable a person, through a constant continuance in well-doing, and a patient, humble submission to the will of God, to obtain that glory, honour, and immortality which the Gospel promises. Nothing but a persevering faith can do it, as is plain from what it has done in former ages’” (John Brown, 1784-1858).

The order of thought followed by the apostle in Hebrews 11 was ably and helpfully set forth by an early Puritan, “The parts of this whole chapter are two—1. A general

description of faith (verses 1 to 4). 2. An *illustration* or declaration of that description, by a large rehearsal of manifold *examples* of ancient and worthy men in the Old Testament (verses 4 to 40). The description of faith consists of three actions or effects of faith set down in [these] several verses. The first effect is that faith makes things which are not (but only are hoped for), after a sort, to subsist and to be present with the believer (verse 1). The second effect is that faith makes a believer approved of God (verse 2). The third effect is that faith makes a man understand and believe things incredible to sense and reason" (Wm. Perkins, 1595).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). The opening "Now" has almost the force of "for," denoting a farther confirmation of what had just been declared. At the close of chapter 10, the apostle had just affirmed that the saving of the soul is obtained through believing, whereupon he now takes occasion to show what faith is and does. That faith can, and does, preserve the soul, prompting to steadfastness under all sorts of trials, and issuing in salvation, may not only be argued from the effects which is its very nature to produce, but is illustrated and demonstrated by one example after another, cited in the verses which follow. It is important to bear in mind at the outset that Hebrews 11 is an amplification and exemplification of 10:38-39. The "faith" which the apostle is describing and illustrating is that which has the *saving of the soul* annexed to it.

"In verse 1, there is the thing described and the description itself. The thing described is faith. The description is this, 'It is the substance of things hoped for,' etc. The description is proper, according to the rules of art—habits (or graces) are described by their formal acts and acts restrained to their proper objects. So faith is here described by its primary and formal acts, which are referred to their distinct objects. The acts of faith are two. It is the substance. It is the evidence. Think it not strange that I call them *acts*, for that is it the apostle intends. Therefore, Beza says, in rendering this place, he had rather paraphrase the text than obscure the scope, and he interpreteth it thus—Faith substantiates or gives a subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen. There is a great deal of difference between the acts of faith and the effects of faith. The effects of faith are reckoned up throughout this chapter. The formal acts of faith are in this verse. These acts are suited with their objects. As the matters of belief are yet to come, faith gives them a substance, a being, as they are hidden from the eyes of sense and carnal reason. Faith also gives them an evidence and doth convince men of the worth of them. So that one of these acts belongs to the *understanding*, the other to the *will*" (Thomas Manton, 1670).

The contents of verse 1 do not furnish so much a formal definition of faith, as they supply a terse description of how it operates and what it produces. Faith, whether natural or spiritual, is the belief of a testimony. Here, faith is believing the testimony of God. How it operates in reference to the subjects of this testimony, whether they be considered simply as future, or as both invisible and future, and the effects produced in and on the soul, the Holy Spirit here explains. First, He tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for." The Greek word rendered "substance" has been variously translated. The margin of the Authorized Version gives "ground or confidence." The Revised Version has "assurance" in the text, and "giving substance to" in the margin. The Greek word is "hypostasis" and is rendered "confident" (should be "this *confidence* of boasting," as in Bagster's Interlinear)

in both 11 Corinthians 9:4 and 11:17; “person” (should be “subsistence” or “essential being”) in Hebrews 1:3; and “confidence” in Hebrews 3:14. Personally, the writer believes it has a double force, so will seek to expound it accordingly.

“Faith is the *confidence* of things hoped for.” In this chapter (and in general throughout the New Testament), “faith” is far more than a bare assent to anything revealed and declared by God. It is a firm persuasion of that which is hoped for, because it assures its possessor not only that there *are* such things, but that through the power and faithfulness of God, he shall yet *possess* them. Thus it becomes the ground of expectation. The Word of God is the *objective* foundation on which my hopes rest, but faith provides a *subjective* foundation, for it convinces me of the certainty of them. Faith and confidence are inseparable. Just so far as I am counting upon the ability and fidelity of the Promiser, shall I be confident of receiving the things promised and which I am expecting. “And we *believe* and are *sure*” (Joh 6:69).

From what has just been said, the reader will perhaps perceive better the force of the rather peculiar word, “substance,” in the text of the Authorized Version. It comes from two Latin words, *sub stans*, meaning “standing under.” Faith provides a firm standing-ground while I await the fulfillment of God’s promises. Faith furnishes my heart with a sure support during the interval. Faith believes God and relies upon His veracity. As it does so, the heart is anchored and remains steady, no matter how fierce the storm nor how protracted the season of waiting. “These all died in faith, *not* having received the [fulfillment of the] promises, *but* having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Heb 11:13). Real faith issues in a confident and standing expectation of future things.

“Faith is the *subsistence* of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1), as the marginal reading of the Revised Version suggests, “giving substance to.” Crediting the sure testimony of God, resting on His promises, and expecting the accomplishment of them, faith gives the object hoped for at a *future* period, a *present* reality and power in the soul, as if already possessed. For the believer is satisfied with the security afforded, and *acts* under the full persuasion that God will not fail of His engagement. Faith gives the soul an *appropriating hold* of them. “Faith is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ, and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul by the first fruits and foretastes of them, so that believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714)

But *how* does faith bring to the heart a present subsistence of future things? First, by drawing from the promises that which, by divine institution, is stored up in them. Hence, they are called the “*breasts* of consolation” (Isa 66:11). Second, by making the promises the food of the soul (Jer 15:16), which cannot be unless they are really *present* unto it. Third, by conveying an experience of their power, as unto all the ends for which they are purposed. It is as divine truth is appropriated and assimilated that it becomes powerfully operative in the soul. Fourth, by communicating unto us the first fruits of the promises, faith gives a living reality to what it absorbs, and so real and potent is the impression made, that the heart is changed into the same image (2Co 3:18).

Ere passing on, let us pause for a word of application. Many profess to “believe,” but *what influence* have their hopes upon them? How are they affected by the things which their faith claims to have laid hold of? I profess to believe that sin is a most heinous thing—do I fear, hate, shun it? I believe that ere long I shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ—does my conduct evince that I am living in the light of that solemn day? I believe that the world is an empty bauble—do I despise its painted tinsel? I believe that God will supply all my need—am I fearful about the morrow? I believe that prayer is an essential means unto growth in grace—do I spend much time in the secret place? I believe that Christ is coming back again—am I diligent in seeking to have my lamp trimmed and burning? Faith is evident by its fruits, works, effects.

Faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). The Greek noun here rendered “evidence” (“proving” in the Revised Version, with “test” in the margin) is derived from a verb which signifies to *convince*, and that by demonstration. It was used by the Lord Jesus when He uttered that challenge, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (Joh 8:46). The noun occurs in only one other place, namely, 11 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is...profitable for doctrine, for *reproof*,” or “conviction”—to give assurance and certainty of what is true. Thus, the word “evidence” in our text denotes that which furnished proof, so that one is assured of the reality and certainty of things divine. “Faith,” then, is first the *hand* of the soul which “lays hold of” the contents of God’s promises. Second, it is the *eye* of the soul which looks out toward and represents them clearly and convincingly to us.

To unbelievers, the invisible, spiritual, and future things revealed in God’s Word seem dubious and unreal, for they have no medium to perceive them. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14). But the child of God *sees* “Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). Perhaps we might illustrate it thus. Two men stand on the deck of a ship gazing toward the far horizon. The one sees nothing; the other describes the details of a distant steamer. The former has only his unaided eyesight, the latter is using a telescope! Now, just as a powerful glass brings home to the eye an object beyond the range of natural vision, so faith gives reality to the heart of things outside the range of our physical senses. Faith sets divine things before the soul in all the light and power of demonstration, and thus provides inward conviction of their existence. “Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things which cannot be discerned by the eye of the body” (Matthew Henry).

The natural man prefers a life of sense and to believe nothing more than that which is capable of scientific demonstration. When eternal things, yet invisible, are pressed upon him, he is full of objections against them. Those are the objections of unbelief, stirred into activity by the “fiery darts” of Satan and nought but the shield of faith can quench them. But when the Holy Spirit renews the heart, the prevailing power of unbelief is broken. Faith argues, “*God* has said it, so it *must* be true.” Faith so convinces the understanding that it is compelled, by force of arguments unanswerable, to believe the certainty of all God has spoken. This conviction is so powerful that the heart is influenced thereby, and the will moved to conform thereto. This it is which causes the Christian to *forsake* the “pleasures of sin” which are only “for a season” (Heb 11:25), because by faith, he has *laid*

hold of those satisfying “pleasures at God’s right hand” which are “for evermore” (Psa 16:11).

To sum up the contents of verse 1—To unbelief, the objects which God sets before us in His Word seem unreal and unlikely, nebulous, and vague. But faith visualizes the unseen, giving substantiality to the things hoped for and reality to things invisible. Faith shuts its eyes to all that is seen and opens its ears to all God has said. Faith is a convictive power which overcomes carnal reasonings, carnal prejudices, and carnal excuses. It enlightens the judgment, moulds the heart, moves the will, and reforms the life. It takes us off earthly things and worldly vanities and occupies us with spiritual and divine realities. It emboldens against discouragements, laughs at difficulties, resists the devil, and triumphs over temptations. It does so because it unites the soul to God and draws strength from Him. Thus faith is altogether a supernatural thing.

“For by it the elders obtained a good report” (Heb 11:2). Having described the principal qualities of faith, the apostle now proceeds to give further proof of its excellency, as is evident from the opening “For.” It is by faith we are approved of God. By the “elders” is signified those who lived in former times, namely, the Old Testament saints—included among the “fathers” of 1:1. It was not be their amiability, sincerity, earnestness, or any other natural virtue, but by *faith* that the ancients “obtained a good report.” This declaration was made by the apostle with the purpose of reminding the Hebrews that their pious progenitors were justified by faith and to the end of the chapter he shows that *faith* was the principle of all their holy obedience, eminent services, and patient sufferings in the cause of God. Therefore, those who were *spiritually* united to them must have something more than physical descent from them.

“For by it the elders obtained a good report” (Heb 11:2). Observe the beautiful accuracy of Scripture. It was not *for* their faith (nor could it be without it!), but “by” their faith. It was not a cause, yet it was a condition. There was nothing meritorious in it, yet it was a necessary means. Let us also observe that faith is no new thing, but a grace planted in the hearts of God’s elect from the beginning. Then, as now, faith was the substance of things hoped for—promises to be accomplished in the future. The faith of Abel laid hold of Christ as truly as does ours. God has had but one way of salvation since sin entered the world, “by grace, through faith, not of works.” See Ephesians 2:8. They are grossly mistaken who suppose that under the old covenant people were saved by keeping the law. The “fathers” had the same promises we have, not merely of Canaan, but of heaven. See Hebrews 11:16.

The Greek for “obtained a good report” is not in the active voice, but the passive. Literally, “were witnessed of,” an honourable testimony being borne to them—cf. verses 4-5. God took care that a record should be kept (complete in heaven, in part transcribed in the Scriptures) of all the actings of their faith. God has borne witness to the fact that Enoch “walked with him” (Gen 5:24), that David was “a man after his own heart” (1Sa 13:14), that Abraham was His “friend” (2Ch 20:7). This testimony of His acceptance of them because of their faith was borne by God not only externally in His Word, but in their consciences. He gave them His Spirit who assured them of their acceptance—Psalm 51:12, Acts 15:8. Let writer and reader learn to esteem what God does. Let us value a Christian

not for his intellect, natural charms, or social position, but for his *faith*, evidenced by an obedient walk and godly life.

We cannot do better in closing our comments upon verse 2 than by giving the “practical observations” on it of John Owen:

“1. Instances or examples are the most powerful confirmations of practical truths. 2. They who have a good testimony from God shall never want reproaches from the world. 3. It is faith alone, which, from the beginning of the world (or from the giving of the first promise), was the means and way of obtaining acceptance with God. 4. The faith of true believers, from the beginning of the world, was fixed on things future, hoped for, and invisible. 5. That faith whereby men please God acts itself in a fixed contemplation on things future and invisible, from whence it derived an encouragement and strength to endure and abide firm in profession, against all opposition and persecutions. 6. Men may be despised, vilified, and reproached in the world, yet if they have faith, if they are true believers, they are accepted with God, and He will give them a good report.”

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). There is a much closer connection between this verse and the two preceding ones than most of the commentators have perceived. The apostle is still setting forth the importance and excellency of faith. Here he affirms that through it, its favoured possessors are enabled to apprehend things which are high above the reach of human reason. The origin of the universe presents a problem which neither science nor philosophy can solve, as is evident from their conflicting and ridiculous attempts. But that difficulty vanishes entirely before *faith*.

“Through faith we *understand*.” Faith is the vehicle or medium of spiritual perception. “If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest *see* the glory of God” (Joh 11:40). “Which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe *and know* the truth” (1Ti 4:3). Faith is not a *blind* reliance on the Word of God, but an intelligent persuasion of its veracity, wisdom, beauty. So far from Christians being the credulous fools the world deems them, they are the wisest of earth’s inhabitants. The “fools” are they who are “slow of heart to believe” (Luk 24:25). Through faith in what has been revealed in the Scriptures, we *know* that the universe is created and fashioned by God. “What does faith give us to understand concerning the worlds, that is, the upper, middle, and lower regions of the universe? 1. That they were not eternal, nor did they produce themselves, but they were made by another. 2. That the Maker of the world is God. He is the Maker of all things and whosoever is so must be God. 3. That He made the world with great exactness. It was a framed work, in everything duly adapted and disposed to answer its end, and to express the perfections of the Creator. 4. That God made the world by His word, that is, by His essential wisdom and eternal Son, *and* by His active will, saying, Let it be done and it was done. 5. That the world was thus framed out of nothing, out of no pre-existent matter, contrary to the received maxim, that out of nothing, nothing can be made, which, though true of created power, can have no place with God, who can call things that are not as if they were, and command them into being. These things we understand by faith” (Matthew Henry).

“That the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). The word for “worlds” in the Greek signifies “ages,” but by a metonymy it is here used of the universe. “The celestial world, with its inhabitants, the angels; the starry and ethereal worlds, with all that is in them, the sun, moon, stars, and fowls of the air; the terrestrial world, with all upon it, man, beasts, etc.; and the watery world, the sea, and all that is therein” (John Gill, 1697-1771). These “worlds” were made at the beginning of the mundane time and have continued throughout all ages. “The apostle accommodated his expression to the received opinion of the Jews, and their way of expressing themselves about the world. ‘Olam’ denotes the world as to the subsistence of it and as to its duration” (John Owen). We do not, then, espouse Bullinger’s strange view of this verse.

The “worlds,” or universe, were “framed,” that is, were adjusted and disposed into a wise and beautiful order, by “the word of God.” That expression is used in a threefold sense. First, there is the essential and personal Word, the eternal Son of God (Joh 1:1). Second, there is the written, ever-living Word, the Holy Scriptures (Joh 10:35). Third, there is the Word of Power, or manifestation of the invincible will of God. It is the last-mentioned that is in view in Hebrews 11:3. The Greek for “word” is *not* “logos” (as in John 1:1), but “rhema” (as in Hebrews 1:3). “Rhema” signifies a word *spoken*. The reference is to God’s imperial fiat, His effectual command, as throughout Genesis 1, “God said [the manifestations of His invincible will] let light be, and light was.” “For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa 33:9). An illustration of the Word of His Power (see Heb 1:3) is found in John 5:28-29.

“So that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). There is some difficulty (in the Greek) in ascertaining the precise meaning of this phrase. Personally, we are inclined to regard it as referring back to Genesis 1:2. The verse before us concerns more directly the *fashioning* of the present heavens and earth, though that necessarily presupposes their original creation. The elements were submerged and darkness enshrouded them. The *practical* force of this verse to us is—our “faith” does not rest upon what “appears” outwardly, but is satisfied with the bare Word of God. Since God created the universe out of nothing, how easily can He preserve and sustain us when there is not anything (to our view) in sight! He, who can call worlds into existence by the Word of His power, can command supplies for the neediest of His creatures.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

8. *His Wanderings*

The picture which the Holy Spirit has given in Scripture of David’s character and life is a composite one. It is somewhat like a painting in which the dominant colours are white, black, and gold. In many details, David has left an example which we do well to follow. In other respects, he presents a solemn warning which we do well to heed. In other features, he was a blessed type of Christ. Thus, the meeting together of these three distinct things in

David may well be likened unto a composite picture. Nor do we exercise a wrong spirit (providing our motive be right) or sully the grace of God by dwelling upon the sad defects in the character of the Psalmist or the failures in his life. Rather will the Spirit's design be realized and our souls be the gainers if we duly take to heart and turn them into earnest prayer that we may be delivered from the snares into which he fell.

At the close of our last article, we saw how that to escape the murderous hatred of Saul, David took refuge with Samuel at Naioth. Thither did his relentless enemy follow him. But wondrously did God interpose. Three times the messengers which the king had sent to arrest David were restrained and awed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but when Saul himself came in person, the Spirit of God subdued and threw him into a kind of ecstatic trance. One would have thought that this signal intervention of God for David had quietened all his fears and filled his soul with praise and thanksgiving unto Him who had shown Himself strong on his behalf. Was it not plain that God did not intend Saul to harm the one whom His prophet had anointed? Ah, but David too was a man of like passions with us and unless divine grace wrought effectually *within* him, no outward providences would avail to spiritualize him. The moment the Lord leaves us to ourselves (to try us, to show what we are), a fall is certain.

Instead of continuing at Naioth, quietly waiting the next token of God's goodness, David became alarmed and took matters into his own hands. Instead of being occupied with the divine perfections, David now saw only a powerful, inveterate, blood-thirsty enemy. Accordingly, the next thing we read is, "And David fled from Naioth in Ramah" (1Sa 20:1). True he "fled" from Saul, but he also turned his back upon Samuel. "And came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" It is solemn to see David preferring a conference with Jonathan rather than with the prophet of God. As usual, the key is hung upon the door. The opening verse of this chapter explains to us what is found in the later ones. It was "natural" that David should turn for help to a "friend," but was it *spiritual*?

Do not the questions David put to Jonathan reveal to us the state of his heart? The "I," "mine," "my," "my," show plainly enough the condition of his mind. God was not now in all his thoughts, yea, *He* was not mentioned at all. The repeated attempts of Saul upon his life had thoroughly unnerved him, and his "there is but a step between me and death" (1Sa 20:3) intimates plainly that unbelieving fears now possessed him. Ah, David needed to turn unto an abler physician than Jonathan if his feverish anxiety was to be allayed. Only One was sufficient for laying a calming and cooling hand upon him. O how much the saint loses when he fails to acknowledge the Lord in *all* his ways (Pro 3:6). But worse—when communion is broken, when the soul is out of touch with God, temptation is yielded unto and grievous sin is committed. It was so here. Afraid that Saul's anger would return when his absence from the table was noted, but fearful to take his place there, David bids Jonathan utter a deliberate lie on his behalf (1Sa 20:5-6). May this speak loudly to each of our hearts, warning of the fearful fruits which issue from severed fellowship with the Lord.

The first false step David had taken was in marrying the daughter of Saul, for it is evident from the sacred narrative that she was no suited partner for the man after God's own heart. His second mistake was his fleeing from Naioth and thus turning his back upon the prophet of God. His third failure was to seek aid of Jonathan. The true character of his

“friend” was exhibited on this occasion. Seeing David so perturbed, he had not the moral courage to acknowledge the truth, but sought to pacify him with a prevarication (1Sa 20:2). Surely Jonathan could not be ignorant of Saul’s having thrown the javelin at David, of the instructions given to the servants to slay him (1Sa 19:11), of the messengers sent to arrest him (1Sa 19:20), and of his going after David in person (1Sa 19:22). But all doubt is removed by, “Saul spake to *Jonathan* his son, and to all his servants, that they should *kill* David” (1Sa 19:1). Jonathan deliberately equivocated in 1 Samuel 20:2, and “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). Thus it was here—David lied too (1Sa 20:5-6).

We do not propose to go over this 20th chapter verse by verse, for we are not now writing a commentary upon 1 Samuel. A plan was agreed upon by Jonathan whereby he should ascertain the latest attitude of his father and acquaint David with the same. A solemn covenant was entered into between them—Jonathan here, and David much later (2Sa 9), faithfully carried out its terms. The words, “David hid himself in the field” (1Sa 20:24 and cf. 1Sa 20:35, 41), at once expose his lie in verse 6, though the commentators have glossed it over. When David was missed from the king’s table and inquiry was made, Jonathan repeated the lie which David had suggested to him. Thereupon the king reviled his son and declared that David “shall surely die” (1Sa 20:31). When Jonathan sought to expostulate and ask why David should be slain, Saul threw his javelin at him. The meeting between Jonathan and David in the field, and their affectionate leave-taking is touchingly described (1Sa 20:41-42).

“Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest” (1Sa 21:1). When a real saint is out of touch with God, when he is in a backslidden state, his conduct presents a strange enigma and his inconsistent ways are such as no psychologist can explain. But much that is inexplicable to many (even to ill-informed believers) is solved for us by Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Here we have set forth the conflict of the two “natures” in the Christian, the irreconcilable opposition between the two mainsprings of conduct, the “flesh” and the “spirit.” According as one or the other of these two principles is actuating and dominating the saint, such will be his course of action. The final clause of this verse has a double force—the presence of the “flesh” hinders the “spirit” from completely realizing its desires in this life (Rom 7:15-25). The presence of the “spirit” prevents the “flesh” from fully having its way.

Galatians 5:17 supplies the key to many a mysterious experience in the life of a Christian, and sheds much light on the checkered histories of the Old Testament saints. We might add many paragraphs at this point by illustrating the last sentence from the lives of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, etc. But instead, we will confine our attention to the leading subject of these articles. In his meeting the attacks of the wild animals (1Sa 17:34-36), in his devotion for the tabernacle (Psa 132:1-7), in his engagement with Goliath, the “spirit” was uppermost in David, and therefore was the Lord before his heart. There had been severe testings of courage and faith, but his trust in the Lord wavered not. Then followed a season in the king’s household, where it was much harder to preserve this spirituality. Then Saul turned against him, and again and again sought his life. Deprived of the outward means of grace, David’s faith flagged, and as it

flagged, fears replaced it, and instead of being occupied with the Lord, his powerful foe filled his vision.

In his flight from Saul, David first sought unto Samuel, which shows that the “flesh” in him was not completely regnant, as it never is in a truly regenerate soul. “Sin shall not have *dominion* over you” (Rom 6:14)—it shall not render you its absolute slave. But in his flight from Samuel and his turning to Jonathan for help, we see the “flesh” more and more regulating his actions—still plainer manifested in the falsehood which he put into his friend’s mouth. And now in his flight unto Ahimelech and the manner in which he conducted himself, the anointed eye may discern the conflict which was at work within him. It now seemed clear unto David that no change for the better was to be expected in Saul. As long as the king was alive, he was in danger. An outcast from the court, he now became a lonely wanderer, but before he journeyed farther afield, his heart was first drawn to Nob, whither the tabernacle had been removed.

Various motives and considerations seem to have moved David in his repairing to Nob. Foreseeing that he must now be an exile, he wished to take leave of the tabernacle, not knowing when he should see it again. It is plain from many of his Psalms that the sorest grief of David during the time of his banishment was his isolation from the house of God and his restraint from public ordinances. “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD...For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa 84:1-2, 10 and cf. 42:3-4, etc.). Second, it seems clear from 1 Samuel 22:10 that David’s purpose was to inquire of the Lord through the high priest to obtain directions from Him as to his path. Third, from what follows here, it appears that food was also his quest.

“And Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David” (1Sa 21:1). Evidently the high priest had heard of David’s having fallen under the displeasure of Saul, and so concluded that he was a fugitive. Knowing the type of man the king was, Ahimelech was fearful of endangering his own life by entertaining David. “And said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?” That there were some “young men” with him is clear from verse 4 and also Matthew 12:3, yet having won such renown both in camp and court, it might well be expected that David should be accompanied by a suitable equipage. The disdain which the high priest showed for David the outcast, illustrates the merciless attitude of the world toward a fallen and impoverished hero.

“And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place” (1Sa 21:2). Here again, we see David guilty of a gross untruth. How solemn to find the Psalmist of Israel telling a deliberate lie at the threshold of the house of God, whither he had come to inquire the mind of the Lord. Verily, each one of us has real need to pray, “Remove from me the way of lying” (Psa 119:29). David’s heart quailed under the embarrassing question of the priest, and he who had dared to meet single-handed the Philistine giant was now afraid to speak the truth. Ah, there cannot be the calm and courage of faith, where faith itself is inoperative. Elijah shrank not from meeting the four hundred prophets of Baal, yet later he fled in terror from Jezebel. Peter dared to step out of

the ship onto the sea, yet trembled before a maid. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1Co 10:12).

It is easier to trust God in days of sunshine than in times of gloom and darkness. “David had often, indeed, before known difficulty and danger—from the day of his conflict with Goliath, he had known little else. But then, there was this difference—in former difficulties, he had been enabled to triumph. Some ray of brightness had gilded every cloud. Some honour awaited him out of each affliction. But now, God seemed no longer to interfere on his behalf. The full enmity of Saul was allowed to take its course and God interfered not, either to subdue or to chasten. He appeared no longer to intend raising David above circumstances, but to allow him to be overcome by them. David’s hearts seemed unable to bear this. To trust God whilst overcoming is one thing; to trust Him when being overcome is another” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

David now asked Ahimelech for five loaves of bread (1Sa 21:3). Bear in mind that he stood at the door of the tabernacle and not before the priest’s personal residence. All that was to hand were the twelve loaves which had rested for a week on the golden table in the sanctuary and which, being replaced at once by twelve more, became the property of the priests and their families. Assuring Ahimelech that he and his men met the requirements of Exodus 19:15, David pressed for the bread being given to him (1Sa 21:5). To what a low estate had the son of Jesse fallen. Now that Saul’s rooted malice was generally known, the people would be afraid and unwilling to befriend him. In Matthew 12:2-8, we find the Lord Jesus vindicating this action, which shows us that the ordinances of religion may be dispensed with where the preservation of life calls for it. Ritual observances must give way to moral duties and in the case of urgent providential necessity, that is permissible which ordinarily may not be done.

“Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdsmen that belonged to Saul” (v. 7). And yet in *his* hearing, David had preferred his urgent request. Surely natural common sense would have prompted him to act with more prudence. Ah, my reader, when the saint is in a backslidden state of soul, he often acts more foolishly than does the man of the world. This is a righteous judgment of God upon him. He has given us His Word to walk by, and that Word is one of *wisdom*, containing salutary counsel. We turn from it at our peril and irreparable loss. To lean unto our own understanding is to court certain disaster. Yet, when communion with God is broken, this is exactly what we do. Then it is that we are suffered to reap the bitter fruits of our evil ways and made to feel the consequences of our folly.

Next, David asked Ahimelech for a weapon, and was told that the only one available was “the sword of Goliath” (1Sa 21:9), which had been preserved in the tabernacle as a monument of the Lord’s goodness to Israel. When told of this, David exclaimed, “There is none like that, give it to me.” Alas, alas, how had the mighty fallen. “Surely it argued ill that his hand should be the first to withdraw the giant weapon from its resting-place in order that he might transfer to *it* a measure, at least of that confidence which he was withdrawing from God. How different the condition of David now and on the day of Goliath’s fall! Then, trusting in the God of Israel and associated with Israel, he had gone out in owned weakness, but now, forsaking Israel and the land of Israel, he went forth

armed with the sword of Goliath, to seek friendship and alliance with the Philistines, the enemies of Israel and the enemies of God" (Benjamin W. Newton).

Thus David now set forth, provisioned (temporarily, at least) and armed. But at what a cost? The unsuspecting priest had believed David's lies and assured by him that Saul had commissioned him, feared not the presence of Doeg the king's servant (1Sa 21:7). But he paid dearly for listening, against his better judgment, to David's falsehoods. That treacherous Edomite informed Saul (1Sa 22:9-10) and later he was ordered by the enraged king to reek a fearful vengeance, "And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep" (1Sa 22:18-19). Such were some of the fearful results of David's lies, as he afterwards acknowledged to the one remaining child of Ahimelech, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house" (1Sam 22:22). May it please the Holy Spirit to powerfully move both writer and reader to lay to heart the whole of this solemn incident, that we may daily pray with increasing earnestness, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mat 6:13).

"He will by means like these,
Thy stubborn temper break;
Soften thy heart by due degrees,
And make thy spirit meek."

PROFITING FROM THE WORD

10. The Scriptures and Love

This article brings to a close the present series. In them, we have sought to point out some of the ways by which we may ascertain whether or not our reading and searching of the Scriptures is really being blest to our souls. Many are deceived on this matter, mistaking an eagerness to acquire knowledge for a spiritual love of the truth (2Th 2:10), and assuming that additions to their store of learning is the same thing as a growth in grace. A great deal depends upon the end or aim we have before us when turning to God's Word. If it be simply to familiarize ourselves with its contents and become better versed in its details, it is likely that the garden of our souls will remain barren. But if with the prayerful desire to be rebuked and corrected by that Word, to be searched by the Spirit to conform our hearts and lives to its holy requirements, then we may expect a divine blessing.

In the preceding articles, we have endeavored to single out the vital things by which we may discover what progress we are making in personal godliness. Various criteria have been given, which it becomes both writer and reader to honestly measure himself by. We have pressed such tests as, Am I acquiring a greater hatred of sin, and a practical deliverance from its power and pollution? Am I obtaining a deeper acquaintance with God

and His Christ? Is my prayer-life healthier, my good works more abundant, my obedience fuller and gladder? Am I more separated from the world in my affections and ways? Am I learning to make a right and profitable use of God's promises and so delighting myself in Him that His joy is my daily strength? Unless I can truthfully say that these *are* (in some measure) my experience, then it is greatly to be feared that my study of the Scriptures is profiting me little or nothing.

It hardly seems fitting that these articles should be concluded until one has been devoted to the consideration of Christian love. The extent to which this spiritual grace is, or is not, being cultivated and regulated, affords another index to the measure in which my perusal of God's Word is helping me spiritually. No one can read the Scriptures with any measure of attention without discovering how much they have to say about *love*, and therefore it behooves each one of us to prayerfully and carefully ascertain whether or no his or her love be really a *spiritual* one, and whether it be in a healthy state and is being exercised aright. It is very easy to be mistaken upon this important point, and therefore it is the part of wisdom to make a close investigation of the same.

The subject of Christ love is far too comprehensive to consider all its varied phases within the compass of a single paper. Properly, we should begin with contemplating the exercise of our love toward God and His Christ, but as this has been at least touched upon in preceding articles, we shall now waive it. Much too might be said about the natural love which we owe to our fellowmen, who belong to the same human family as we do, but there is less need to write thereon than upon what is now before our mind. Here, we propose to confine our attention to spiritual love unto the brethren, the brethren of Christ.

1. We are profited from the Word when we perceive the *great importance* of Christian love. Nowhere is this brought out more emphatically than in 1 Corinthians 13. There, the Holy Spirit tells us that though a professing Christian can speak fluently and eloquently upon divine things, and has not love, he is like metal, which, though it makes a noise when struck, is lifeless. That though he can prophesy, understand all mysteries and knowledge, and have faith which brings miracles to pass, but be lacking in love, he is a spiritual non-entity. Yea, that though he be so benevolent as to give away all his worldly possessions to feed the poor and yield his body to a martyr's death, and have not love, it profits him nothing. How high a value is here placed upon love, and how essential for me to make sure I possess it!

Said our Lord, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Joh 13:35). By Christ's making it the badge of Christian discipleship, we see again the great importance of love. It is an essential test of the genuineness of our profession. We cannot love Christ, but we must love His brethren, for they are all bound up in the same "bundle of life" (1Sa 25:29) with Him. Love to those whom He has redeemed is a sure evidence of spiritual and supernatural love to the Lord Jesus Himself. Where the Holy Spirit has wrought a supernatural birth, He will draw forth that nature into exercise, He will produce in the hearts and lives and conduct of the saints supernatural graces, one of which is loving each other for Christ's sake.

2. We are profited from the Word when we learn to detect the *sad perversions* of Christian love. As water will not rise above its own level, so the natural man is incapable of understanding, still less appreciating, that which is spiritual (1Co 2:14). Therefore, we

should not be surprised when unregenerate professors mistake human sentimentality and carnal pleasantries for spiritual love. But sad is it to see some of God's own people living on so low a plane that they confuse human amiability and affability with this queen of the Christian graces. While it be true that spiritual love is characterized by meekness and gentleness, yet is it something very different from and vastly superior to the courtesies and kindnesses of the flesh.

How many a doting father has withheld the rod from his children, under the mistaken notion that real affection for them and the chastising of them were incompatible? How many a foolish mother, who disdained all corporal punishment, has boasted that "love" rules in her home? One of the most trying experiences of the writer, in his extensive travels, has been to spend a season in homes where the children had been completely spoiled. It is a wicked perversion of the word "love" to apply it to such moral laxity and parental looseness. But this same pernicious idea rules the minds of many people in other connections and relations. If a servant of God rebukes their fleshly and worldly ways, if he presses the uncompromising claims of God, he is at once charged with being "lacking in love." O how terribly are multitudes deceived by Satan on this important subject!

3. We are profited from the Word when we are taught the *true nature* of Christian love. Christian love is a spiritual grace abiding in the soul of the saints alongside of faith and hope (1Co 13:13). It is a holy disposition wrought in them when they are regenerated (1Jo 5:1). It is nothing less than the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is a righteous principle which seeks the highest good of others. It is the very reverse of that principle of self-love and self-seeking which is in us by nature. It is not only an affectionate regard for all who bear the image of Christ, but also a powerful desire to promote their welfare. It is not a fickle sentiment which is easily offended, but an abiding dynamic which "many waters" of cold indifference, of "floods" of dis-appreciation can neither quench nor drown (Song 8:7). Though coming far short in degree, it is the same in essence as His of whom we read, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1).

There is no safer and surer way of obtaining a right conception of the nature of Christian love than by making a thorough study of its perfect exemplification in and by the Lord Jesus. When we say a "thorough study," we mean the taking a comprehensive survey of *all* that is recorded of Him in the four Gospels, and not the limiting of ourselves to a few favourite passages or incidents. As this is done, we discover that His love was not only benevolent and magnanimous, thoughtful and gentle, unselfish and self-sacrificing, patient and unchanging, but many other elements also entered into it. Love could deny an urgent request (Joh 11:6-7), rebuke His mother (Joh 2:4), use a whip (Joh 2:15), severely upbraid His doubting disciples (Luk 24:25), and denounce hypocrites (Mat 23:13-33). Love can be stern (Mat 16:23), yea, angry (Mar 3:5). Spiritual love is a *holy* thing. It is faithful to God. It is uncompromising toward all that is evil.

4. We are profited from the Word when we discover that Christian love is of *divine communication*. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1Jo 3:14). "Love to the brethren is the fruit and effect of a new and supernatural birth, wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit, as the blessed evidence of our having been chosen in Christ by the Divine Father, before the world was. To love Christ and His, and

our brethren in Him, is congenial to that divine nature He hath made us the partakers of by His Holy Spirit....This love of the brethren must be a *peculiar* love, such as none but the regenerate are the subjects of, and which none but they can exercise, or the apostle would not have so particularly mentioned it. It is such, as those who have it not, are in a state of unregeneracy; so it follows—‘he that loveth not his brother abideth in death’” (S. E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

Love for the brethren is far, far more than a finding agreeable the society of those whose temperaments are similar to or whose views accord with my own. It pertains not to mere nature, but is a spiritual and supernatural thing. It is the heart being drawn out to those in whom I perceive *something of Christ*. Thus, it is very much more than a party spirit. It embraces *all* in whom I can see the image of God’s Son. It is, therefore, a loving them for Christ’s sake, for what I see of Christ in them. It is the Holy Spirit within attracting and alluring me with Christ indwelling my brethren and sisters. Thus, real Christian love is not only a divine gift, but is altogether dependent upon God for its invigoration and exercise. We need to pray daily that the Holy Spirit will call forth into action and manifestation, toward both God and His people, that love which He has shed abroad in our hearts.

5. We are profited from the Word when we *rightly exercise* Christian love. This is done not be seeking to please our brethren and ingratiate ourselves in their esteem, but when we truly seek their highest good. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments” (1Jo 5:2). What is the real test of my personal love to God Himself? It is my keeping of His commandments, see John 14:15, 21, 24; 15:10, 14. The genuineness and strength of my love to God is not to be measured by my words, nor by the lustiness with which I sing His praises, but by my obedience to His Word. The same principle holds good in my relations with my brethren.

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments” (1Jo 5:2). If I am glossing over the faults of my brethren and sisters, if I am walking with them in a course of self-will and self-pleasing, then I am *not* “loving” them. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and *not* suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:17). Love is to be exercised in a divine way, and never at the expense of my failing to love God. In fact, it is only when God has His proper place in my heart that spiritual love can be exercised by me toward my brethren. True spiritual love does not consist in gratifying them, but in pleasing God and helping them, and I can only *help* them in the path of God’s commandments.

Petting and pampering each other is not brotherly love. Exhorting one another to press forward in the race that is set before us, and speaking words (enforced by the example of our daily walk) which will encourage them to “look off unto Jesus” would be much more helpful. Brotherly love is to be a holy thing, and not a fleshly sentiment or a loose indifference as to the path we are treading. God’s “commandments” are expressions of His love, as well as of His authority, and to ignore them, even while seeking to be kindly affectioned one to another, is not “love” at all. The *exercise* of love is to be in strict conformity to the revealed will of God. We are to love “in the truth” (3Jo 1:4).

6. We are profited from the Word when we are taught the *varied manifestations* of Christian love. To love our brethren and manifest the same in all kinds of ways is our

bounden duty. But at no point can we do this more truly and effectually, and with less affection and ostentation, than by having fellowship with them at the throne of grace. There are brethren and sisters in Christ, in the four corners of the earth, about the details of whose trials and conflicts, temptations and sorrows, I know nothing. Yet I can express my love for them and pour out my heart before God on their behalf by earnest supplication and intercession. In no other way can the Christian more manifest his affectionate regard toward his fellow-pilgrims than by using all his interest in the Lord Jesus Christ in their behalf, intreating His mercies and favours unto them.

“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1Jo 3:17-18). Many of God’s people are very poor in this world’s goods. Sometimes they wonder why this is. It is a great trial unto them. One reason why the Lord permits this is that others of His saints may have their compassion drawn out and minister to their temporal needs from the abundance with which God has furnished them. Real love is intensely practical. It considers no office too mean, no task too humbling, where the sufferings of a brother can be relieved. When the Lord of Love was here upon earth, He had thought for the bodily hunger of the multitude and the comfort of His disciples’ feet!

But there are some of the Lord’s people so poor that they have very little indeed to share with others. What, then, may they do? Why, make the spiritual concerns of all the saints their own. Interest themselves on their behalf at the throne of grace. We know by our own cases and circumstances what the feelings, sorrows, complaints, other saints must be the subjects of. We know from sad experience how easy it is to give way to a spirit of discontent and murmuring. But we also know how, when we have cried unto the Lord for His quieting hand to be laid upon us, and when He has brought some precious promise to our remembrance, what peace and comfort have come to our heart. Then, let us beg Him to be equally gracious to all His distressed saints. Let us seek to make their burdens our own, and weep with them that weep, as well as rejoice with them that rejoice. Thus shall we express real love for their persons in Christ by intreating their Lord and our Lord to remember them with everlasting kindness.

This is how the Lord Jesus is now manifesting *His* love to His saints, “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). He makes their cause and care His own. He is intreating the Father on their behalf. None is forgotten by Him. Every lone sheep is borne upon the heart of the Good Shepherd. Thus, by expressing our love to the brethren in daily prayers for the supply of their various needs, we are brought into fellowship with our great High Priest. Not only so, but the saints will be endeared to us thereby. Our very praying for them as the beloved of God will increase our love and esteem for them as such. We cannot carry them *on* our hearts before the throne of grace without cherishing *in* our own hearts a real affection for them. The best way of overcoming a bitter spirit to a brother who has offended is to be much in prayer for him!

7. We are profited from the Word when we are taught the *proper cultivation* of Christian love. Space will only permit us to suggest one or two rules for this. First, recognizing at the outset that, just as there is much in you (in me) which will severely try the love of the brethren, so there will be not a little in them to test your love. “*Forbearing*

one another in love” (Eph 4:2) is the great admonition on this subject which each of us needs to lay to heart. It is surely striking to note that the very first quality of spiritual love named in 1 Corinthians 13 is “Charity *suffereth* long” (1Co 13:4)!

Second, the best way to cultivate any virtue or grace is to *exercise* it. Talking and theorizing about it avails nothing, unless it be carried into action. Many are the complaints heard today about the littleness of the love which is being manifested in many places. That is all the more reason why I should seek to set a better example! Suffer not the coldness and unkindness of others to dampen your love, but “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). Prayerfully ponder 1 Corinthians 13 at least once a week.

Third, above all see to it that your own heart basks in the light and warmth of God’s love. Like begets like. The more you are truly occupied with the unwearying, unfailing, unfathomable love of Christ to you, the more will your heart be drawn out in love to those who are His. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the fact that the particular apostle who wrote most upon brotherly love is he who leaned upon the Master’s bosom. The Lord grant all requisite grace to both reader and writer (than whom none more needs to heed them) to observe these rules, to the praise of the glory of His grace, and to the good of His dear people.

CONVICTION OF SIN

This comprehends *knowledge* and *assent*. It comprehends the knowledge of what the Scripture speaks against sin and sinners, and that the Scripture so speaks is the Word of God. It comprehends a sincere assent to the verity of Scripture, and some knowledge of ourselves, particularly, of our guilt and its consequences.

This conviction comprehends not only knowledge and assent, but *sensibility*. God works on the heart as well as on the head. Both were corrupted and out of order. The principle of new life, therefore, quickens both. The knowledge which is merely theoretical, never suitably moves the affections. The doctrines of religion produce in the understanding of an unrenewed soul, but a superficial apprehension, and therefore, can produce in the heart but small sensibility. As hypocrites may know many things, but nothing with the clear apprehensions of an experienced man, so may they be slightly affected. To view in the map of the Gospel the precious things of Christ and His kingdom, may slightly affect us, but to thirst for and drink of the living waters and to be heir of that kingdom must needs work another kind of sensibility. The great things of sin, of grace, and Christ, and eternity, which are of weight one would think to move a rock, shake not the heart of the carnal professor. It is true, some soft and passionate natures may have tears at command, when one that is truly gracious hath none. Yet is this Christian with dry eyes more solidly apprehensive and more deeply affected than the other is in the midst of his tears, and the weeping hypocrite will be drawn to his sin again by a trifle, which the groaning Christian would not be hired to commit by crowns and kingdoms. The following are some of the things of which sinners are convinced by the Spirit of God.

1. They are convinced of *the evil of sin*. The sinner is made to know and feel that sin, which was his delight, is indeed a loathsome thing; a breach of the righteous law of the Most High God, dishonourable to Him, and destructive to the soul. He was wont to marvel what made men raise such an outcry against sin or what harm it was for a man to take a little forbidden pleasure. He saw no such heinousness in it that Christ must needs die for it and most of the would be eternally tormented in hell on account of it. He thought this was somewhat hard measure and greater punishment than could possibly be deserved by a little fleshly liberty or worldly delight, by the neglect of Christ, His Word, or worship, by a wanton thought, a vain word, a dull duty, or a cold affection, but now his views are changed. God hath opened his eyes to see the inexpressible vileness of sin which satisfies him of the reasonableness of all this.

2. They are convinced of *their misery*. He who before read the threatenings of God's law, as men do the stories of foreign wars or as they behold the wounds and the blood in a picture which never makes him smart or fear, now finds it is *his own* story, and he perceives that it is his own doom, and if he found his name written in the curse or heard that law say, as Nathan, "Thou art the man" (2Sa 12:7). The wrath of God seemed to be but as a storm to a man in a dry house or as the pains of the sick to the healthy bystander, but now he finds the disease is his own and feels the smart of the wounds of his own soul. In a word, he finds himself a condemned man, that he is dead and damned in point of law and that nothing was wanting but the mere execution to make him absolutely and irrecoverably miserable.

Whether you call this a work of the law or Gospel, yet sure I am it is a work of the Spirit wrought, in some measure, in all the regenerate. And though some do judge it unnecessary bondage, yet it is beyond my conception how he should come to Christ for pardon that did not first find himself guilty and condemned, or for life that never felt himself dead. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Mar 2:17). Yet I deny not that some gracious souls may scarcely perceive and others scarcely remember this work of humiliation. The discovery of the remedy, *as soon as* the misery, must needs prevent a great part of the trouble and make the distinct effect on the soul to be with much more difficulty discerned. Nay, the actings of the soul are so quick and often so confused that the distinct order of these workings may not be apprehended or remembered at all. And perhaps, the joyful apprehensions of mercy may make the sense of misery the sooner forgotten.

3. They are convinced of *the vanity and insufficiency of the creature*. Every man is naturally an idolater. Our hearts turned from God in our first fall and ever since the creature has been our god. When God should guide us, we guide ourselves. When He should be our sovereign, we rule ourselves. The laws which He gives us, we would correct, and if we had the making of them, we would have made them otherwise. When we should depend on Him for our daily mercies, we would rather keep our stock ourselves and have our fortune in our own hands. When we should stand at His disposal, we would be at our own. When we should submit to His providence, we usually quarrel with it, as if we knew better what is good for us than He and how to dispose of all things more wisely.

Thus we are naturally our own idols. But down falls this Dagon when God once renews the soul. It is the great business of that great work to bring the heart back to God Himself.

He convinces the sinner that the creature of itself can neither be his God to make him happy, nor yet his Christ to recover him from his misery and restore him to God, who is his happiness. This God does not only by His Word, but by His providence also, because words seem but wind and will hardly take off the raging senses. He that therefore makes His rod to speak, and continue speaking, till the sinner hear and learn by it this great lesson. This is the great reason why afflictions so ordinarily concur in the great work of conversion. When a sinner makes honour his god and God shall cast him into lowest disgrace, or bring him that idolized his riches into a condition wherein they cannot help him—what a powerful help is here to this conviction! When a man that made pleasure his god, whether ease or sports, or mirth or company, or gluttony or drunkenness or whatsoever—a ranging eye, a curious ear, a raging appetite, or a lustful heart to desire, and God should take these from him, or turn them all into gall and wormwood—what a help is here to this conviction! When God shall cast a man into a languishing sickness and inflict wounds and anguish on his heart and stir up against him his own conscience and then, as it were, take him by the hand and lead him to credit, to riches, to pleasure, to company, to sports, or whatsoever was dearest to him, and say, “Now try if these can help thee. Can these heal thy wounded conscience? Can they support thy tottering frame? Can they keep thy departing soul in thy body? Will they prove to thee eternal pleasures, or redeem thy soul from eternal flames? Cry aloud to them and see whether these will now be unto thee instead of God and His Christ.” O how this works with the sinner when sense itself acknowledges the truth and even the flesh is convinced of the creature’s vanity and our very deceiver is now undeceived. Now he despises his former idols and calls them all miserable comforters. He chides himself for his former folly and pities those that have no higher happiness.

4. They are convinced of *the absolute necessity, the full sufficiency, and the perfect excellency of Jesus Christ*. This conviction is not by mere argumentation, but also by the sense of our desperate misery, as a man in famine is convinced of the necessity of food, or as a man that has heard his sentence of condemnation is convinced of the necessity of pardon, or as a man that lies in prison for a debt is convinced of the necessity of a surety to discharge it. Now the sinner finds himself in another case than ever he was aware of. He feels an insupportable burden upon him, and sees that there is none but Christ can take it off. He perceives that he is under the wrath of God, and that the law proclaims him a rebel and an outlaw and that none but Christ can make his peace. He feels the curse lie upon him and upon all he has and that Christ alone can make him blessed. He is now brought to this dilemma, either he must have Christ to justify him or be eternally condemned. He must have Christ to bring him to God or be eternally shut out from His presence. And now no wonder if he cries as the martyr Lambert, “None but Christ, none but Christ.” It is not gold but bread that will satisfy the hungry, nor any thing but pardon that will comfort the condemned. All things are now but “dross and dung,” and what he counted gain is now “but loss in comparison of Christ.” See Phi 3:8. For as the sinner sees his utter misery and the inability of himself and all things to relieve him, so he perceives that there is no saving mercy out of Christ.

And as the soul is convinced of the necessity of Christ, so also of His full sufficiency. He sees that though the fig leaves of our own righteousness are too small to cover our

nakedness, yet the righteousness of Christ is large enough—that though ours is disproportioned to the justice of the law, yet Christ's does extend to every tittle. His sufferings being a perfect satisfaction to the law, and all power in heaven and in earth being given to Him, He is able to supply all our wants and “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25).

The sinner is also convinced of the perfect excellency of Jesus Christ, both as He is considered in Himself and as considered in relation to us—both as He is the only way to the Father, and as He is the end, being one with the Father. Before, he knew Christ's excellency as a blind man knows of the sun, but now he knows it as one that beholds His glory.

After this sensible conviction, *the will also discovers its change*, and that in regard to all the four objects mentioned. (1) The sin which the understanding pronounces evil, the will accordingly turns from with abhorrence. Not that the sensitive appetite is changed, or any way made to abhor its object, but when it would prevail against the conclusions of reason, and carry us to sin against God, Scripture becomes the rule, and reason the master, and sense the servant.

(2) The misery which sin has produced, he not only discerns, but bewails. It is impossible that the convinced soul should look either on its trespass against God or yet on its own self-procured calamity without compunction and contrition. He who truly discerns that he has crucified Christ, and killed himself, will surely in some measure be “pricked at the heart” See Act 2:37. If he cannot weep, he can heartily groan, and his heart feel what his understanding sees.

(3) The creature he now renounces as vain, and turns it out of his heart with disdain. Not that he undervalues it or disclaims its use, but only its idolatrous abuse and its unjust usurpation.

(4) He turns to God as his Father and to Christ as his Saviour. Having before been convinced that nothing else can be his happiness, he now finds it is in God, and therefore looks toward it. But yet it is rather with desire and hope, for the sinner has already found himself to be a stranger and an enemy to God, under the guilt of sin and the curse of the law, and knows there is no coming to Him in peace till his state be changed. And therefore having before been convinced that only Christ is able and willing to do this, and having heard this mercy in the Gospel freely offered, his next act is to accept of Christ Jesus as his Saviour and Lord. For in *both* relations will He be received or not at all. It is not only to acknowledge His sufferings and accept of pardon and glory, but to acknowledge His sovereignty and submit to His government (Richard Baxter, 1650).

ASSURANCE

By way of introduction and in order to acquaint the reader with the particular angle of viewpoint from which we now approach our present theme, let it be pointed out that changing conditions in Christendom call for an ever-varying emphasis on different aspects of divine truth. Did space allow and were the writer fully equipped for such a task, it would be both interesting and instructive to give in detail *the history* of the preaching of Assurance throughout this dispensation. Instead, we can barely outline it. At different periods, the true servants of God have had to face widely different situations and meet errors of varied character. This has called for a campaign of offense and defense adapted to the exigencies of many situations. The weapons suited to one conflict were quite useless for another, fresh ones needing to be constantly drawn from the armoury of Scripture.

At the close of that lengthy period known as "the dark ages" (though throughout it, God never left Himself without a clear witness), when the Lord caused a flood of light to break forth upon Christendom, the Reformers were faced by the hoary errors of Romanism, among which was her insistence that none could be positively assured of his salvation till the hour of death was reached. This caused Luther and his contemporaries to deliver a positive message, seeking to stimulate confidence toward God and the laying hold of His sure promises. Yet it has to be acknowledged that there were times when their zeal carried them too far, leading to a position which could not be successfully defended from the Scriptures. Many of the Reformers insisted that assurance was an essential element in saving faith itself, and that unless a person *knew* he was "accepted in the Beloved," he was yet in his sins. Thus, in the revolt from Romanism, the Protestant pendulum swung too far to the opposite side.

In the great mercy of God, the *balance* of truth was restored in the days of the Puritans. The principal doctrine which Luther and his fellows had emphasized so forcibly was justification by faith alone, but at the close of the sixteenth century and in the early part of the seventeenth, such men as Perkins, Gattaker, Rollock, etc. made prominent the collateral doctrine of sanctification by the Spirit. For the next fifty years, the church on earth was blest with many men "mighty in the Scriptures," deeply taught of God, enabled by Him to maintain a well-rounded ministry. Such men as Goodwin, Owen, Charnock, Flavel, Sibbes, etc., though living in troublous times and suffering fierce persecution, taught the Word more helpfully (in our judgment) and were more used of God than any since the days of the apostles to the present hour.

The ministry of the Puritans was an exceedingly searching one. While magnifying the free grace of God in no uncertain terms, while teaching plainly that the satisfaction of Christ alone gave *title* to heaven, while emphatically repudiating all creature-merits, they nevertheless insisted that a supernatural and transforming work of the Spirit in the heart and life of the believer was indispensable to fit him for heaven. Professors were rigidly tested and the results and fruits of faith were demanded before its presence was admitted. Self-examination was frequently insisted upon and full details given as to how one might ascertain that he was a "new creature in Christ Jesus." Christians were constantly urged to "make their calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10) by ascertaining that they had clear

evidence of the same. While conditions were far from being perfect, yet there is good reason to conclude that more deluded souls were undeceived and more hypocrites exposed than at any other period since the first century A.D.

The eighteenth century witnessed a sad declension and departure from the faith. Worldly prosperity brought in spiritual deterioration. As the Puritan leaders died off, none were raised up to fill their places. Arminianism spread rapidly, followed by Deism (Unitarianism), and other fatal errors. Worldliness engulfed the churches and lawlessness and wickedness were rampant without. The Gospel-trumpet was almost silent and the remnant of God's people dwindled down to an insignificant and helpless handful. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Again the light of God shone forth powerfully in the darkness—Whitefield, Romaine, Gill, Hervey, and others being raised up by God to revive His saints and convert many sinners to Christ. The main emphasis of their preaching and teaching was upon the sovereign grace of God as exhibited in the everlasting covenant, the certain efficacy of Christ's atonement unto all for whom it was made, and the work of the Spirit in regeneration.

Under the God-given revivals of the latter part of the eighteenth century, the great *doctrines* of the Christian faith occupied the most prominent place. In order that the balance of truth might be preserved during the next two or three generations, it became necessary for the servants of God to emphasize the *experimental* side of things. Intellectual orthodoxy qualifies none for heaven. There must be a moral and spiritual transformation, a miracle of grace wrought within the soul, which begins at regeneration and is carried on by sanctification. During that period, doctrinal exposition receded more and more into the background, and the practical application of the Word to the heart and life was the characteristic feature in orthodox circles. This called for serious self-examination, and that, in many cases, resulted in doubtings and despondency. Where a due balance is not preserved by preachers and teachers between the objective and subjective sides of the truth, where the latter preponderates, either a species of mysticism or a lack of assurance ensues.

The second half of last century found many circles of professing Christians on the borders of the Slough of Despond. In many companies, the full assurance of salvation was looked upon as a species of fanaticism or as carnal presumption. Unduly occupied with themselves, ill-instructed upon the "two natures" in the Christian, thousands of poor souls regarded doubts and fears, sighs and groans, as the highest evidence of a regenerate state, but those being mixed with worldly and fleshly lustings, the subjects were afraid to affirm they were children of God. To meet this situation, many ill-trained evangelists and teachers sought to direct attention to Christ and His "finished work," and to get their hearers' confidence placed upon the bare Word of God. While one evil was corrected, another was committed. While the letter of Scripture was honoured, the work of the Spirit was (unwittingly) dishonoured. Supposing they had a remedy which was sure to work in all cases alike, a superficial work resulted, the aftermath of which we are now reaping. Thousands of souls who give no evidence of being born again are quite confident that Christ has saved them.

From the brief outline presented above, it will be seen that the pendulum has swung from one side to the other. Man is a creature of extremes, and nought but the grace of God can enable any of us to steer a middle path. A careful study of the course of religious

history also reveals the fact that the servants of God have been obliged, from time to time, to vary their note of emphasis. This is one meaning of that expression, "And be established in the present truth" (2Pe 1:12), namely, that particular aspect or line of truth which is most needful at any given time. Instead of gaining ground, the Puritans had lost it had they merely echoed what the Reformers had taught. It was not that Owen contradicted Luther, rather did he *supplement* him. Where particular stress has been laid on the counsels of sovereign grace and the imputed righteousness of Christ, this needs to be followed by attention being drawn to the work of the Spirit *within* the saints. In like manner, where much ministry has been given on the Christian's state, there is a need for a clear exposition of his standing before God.

It is truly deplorable that so few have recognized the need for *applying* the principle that has just been mentioned. So many, having a zeal which is not tempered by knowledge, suppose that because some honoured servant of God in the past was granted much success through his dwelling so largely upon one particular line of truth, that *they* will have equal success provided they imitate him. But circumstances alter cases. The different states through which the professing church passes, calls for different ministry. There is such a thing as "a word spoken *in due season*" (Pro 15:23). O that it may please God to open the eyes of many to see *what* is most "seasonable" for the degenerate times in which our lot is cast, and grant them spiritual discernment to recognize that even many portions of divine truth may prove highly injurious to souls if given them *out of season*.

We recognize this fact easily enough in connection with material things. Why are we so slow to do so when it concerns spiritual things? Meats and nuts are nutritious, but who would think of feeding an infant upon them? So too sickness of body calls for a change of diet. The same is true of the soul. To make this clearer, let us select one or two extreme cases. The truth of eternal punishment should be faithfully preached by every servant of God, but would a broken-hearted woman, who had just lost her husband or child, be a suitable audience? The glory and bliss of the heavenly state is a precious theme, but would it be fitting to present it unto a professing Christian who was intoxicated? The eternal security of the saints is clearly revealed in Holy Writ, but does that justify me pressing it on the attention of a *backslidden* child of God?

Our introduction has been a lengthy one, yet we deemed it necessary to pave the way for what follows. The servant of God is facing today a dreadfully serious and solemn situation. Much that is dearest of all to his heart he has largely to be silent upon. If he is to faithfully deal with souls, he must address himself to the condition they are in. Unless he is much upon his guard, unless he constantly seeks wisdom and guidance from above, he is likely to make bad matters worse. On every side are people full of assurance, certain that they are journeying to heaven. Yet their daily lives show plainly that they are deceived and that their assurance is only a fleshly one. Thousands are, to use their own words, "resting on John 3:16" or 5:24 and have not the slightest doubt they will spend eternity with Christ. Nevertheless, it is the bounden duty of every real servant of God to tell the great majority of them that they are woefully deluded by Satan. O that it may please God to give us the ear and serious attention of some of them.

Sometime ago, we read of an incident which, as nearly as we recall, was as follows. Nearly one hundred years since, conditions in England were similar to what they have

recently been in this country. Banks were failing and people were panic-stricken. One man, who had lost confidence in the banks, drew out all his money in five-pound notes and then got a friend to change them into gold. Conditions grew worse, other banks failed, and some of this man's friends told him they had lost their all. With much confidence, he informed them that he had drawn out his money, had changed it into gold, and that this was secretly hidden where no one would find it, so that he was perfectly safe. A little later, when needing to buy some things, he went to his secret hoard and took out five golden sovereigns. He went from one shop to another, but none would accept them—they were bad ones. Thoroughly alarmed, he went to his hidden money, only to find that it was all counterfeit coin!

Now dear reader, you too may be quite sure that *your* faith in Christ is *true* "gold," and yet, after all, be mistaken. The danger of this is not fancied, but real. The human heart is dreadfully deceitful (Jer 17:9). God's Word plainly warns us that, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is *not washed* from their filthiness" (Pro 30:12). Do you ask (O that you *may*, in deep earnestness and sincerity), How can I be sure that my faith is a genuine and saving one? The answer is, *Test* it. Make certain that it is the "faith of God's elect" (Ti 1:1). Ascertain whether or not your faith is accompanied with those *fruits* which are inseparable from a God-given and Spirit-wrought faith.

Probably many are ready to say, "There is no need for me to be put to any such trouble. I *know* that *my* faith is a saving one, for I am resting on the finished work of Christ." But dear friend, it is foolish to talk like that. God Himself bids His people *to make* their "calling and election *sure*" (2Pe 1:10). Is that a needless exhortation? O pit not your vain confidence against divine wisdom. It is Satan who is striving so hard to keep many from this very task, lest they discover that their house is built on the sand. There is hope for one who discovers his illusionment, but there is none for those who go on believing the devil's lie and rest content with the very real but *false* peace which he gives to so many of his poor victims.

God Himself has supplied us *with tests* and we are mad if we do not avail ourselves of them and honestly measure ourselves by them. "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, and that ye may believe [more intelligently] on the name of the Son of God" (1Jo 5:13). The Holy Spirit Himself moved one of His servants to write a whole epistle to instruct us *how* we might know whether or not we have eternal life. Does that look as though the question may be determined and settled as easily as so many present-day preachers and writers represent it? If nothing more than a firm persuasion of the truth of John 3:16 or 5:24 be needed to assure me of my salvation, then why did God give a whole epistle to instruct us on this subject?

Let the really concerned soul read slowly and thoughtfully through this first epistle of John and let him duly observe that not once in its five chapters are we told, "We know that we have passed from death unto life *because* we are resting on the finished work of Christ." The total absence of such a statement ought surely to convince us that something must be radically wrong with so much of the popular teaching of the day on this subject. But not only is there no such declaration made in this epistle, the very first passage which contains the familiar, "We know," is quite the reverse of what is now being so widely

advocated as *the ground* of Christian assurance. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1Jo 2:3). Is not that plain enough? A *godly life* is the first proof that I am a child of God.

But let us observe the solemn declaration that immediately follows. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). Do these words anger you? We trust not. They are *God’s*, not ours. Do you refuse to read any more of this article? That would be a bad sign. An *honest* heart does not fear the light. A sincere soul is willing to be searched by the truth. If you are unable to endure now the feeble probings of one of His servants, how will it fare in a soon-coming day when the Lord Himself shall search you through and through? O dear friend, give your poor soul a fair chance and be willing to ascertain whether your faith is real wheat or only chaff. If it prove to be the latter, there is still time for you to humble yourself before God and cry unto Him to give you saving faith. But in that day it will be too late!

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). How plain and pointed is this language! How awful its clear intimation! Do you not see, dear reader, this verse plainly implies that there *are* those who claim to *know* Christ and yet are liars? The father of lies has deceived them and he is doing everything in his power to keep them from being undeceived. *That* is why the unregenerate reader finds this article so unpalatable and wishes to turn from it. O resist this inclination, we beseech you. God has given us this very verse by which we may measure ourselves and discover whether or not *our* “assurance of salvation” will stand the test of His Holy Word. Then act not like the silly ostrich, which buries his head in the sand, rather than face his danger.

Let us quote one more verse from this *first* “we know” passage in John’s epistle. “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1Jo 2:5). This stands in sharp contrast from the preceding verse. The apostle was here moved to set before us some clear scriptural *evidences* of spiritual faith and love, which constitute the vital difference between sheep and goats. In verse 4, it is the empty professor who says, “I know Christ as my personal Saviour.” He has a theoretical, but not a vital knowledge of Him. He boasts that he is resting on Christ’s finished work, and is confident that he is saved, but keeps not His commandments. He is still a *self-pleaser*. Like Solomon’s sluggard, he is “wiser in his own conceits than seven men that *can* render a reason” (Pro 26:16). He talks boldly, but walks carelessly.

In verse 5, it is the genuine Christian who is in view. *He* does not *say*, “I know Him,” instead he *proves* it. The apostle is not here presenting Christ as the immediate object of faith, but is describing him who has savingly fled to the Lord for refuge and this by the effects produced. In him, Christ’s Word is everything—his food, his constant meditation, his chart. He “keeps” it, in memory, in heart, in action. Christ’s “commandments” occupy his thoughts and prayers as much as do His promises. That Word working in him, subdues his carnal desires, feeds his graces, and draws them into real exercise and act. That Word has *such* a place in his heart and mind that he cannot but give proof of the same in his talk and walk. In *this* way the “love of God is perfected” (1Jo 2:5). The family likeness is plainly stamped upon him. All can see to *which* “father” he belongs—contrast John 8:44).

“*Whoso keepeth his word...hereby [in this way] know we that we are in him.*” Keep His Word perfectly? No. But actually, characteristically, in deep desire and honest effort to do so? Yes. Regeneration is that miracle of divine grace wrought in the soul which enlists the affections Godward, which brings the human will into subjection to the divine, and which produces a real and radical change in the life. That change is from worldliness to godliness, from disobedience to obedience. At the new birth, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and that love is manifested in a dominating longing and sincere purpose *to please in all things* the One who has plucked me as a brand from the burning. There is a greater difference between the genuine Christian and the deceived professing Christian than there is between a living man and a corpse. None need remain in doubt if they will *honestly measure themselves* by the Holy Word of God.

There is only space left for us to consider one other Scripture in this opening article, namely, the parable of the sower. Why did the Lord Jesus give us that parable? Why, but to stir me up to serious inquiry and diligent examination so as to discover *which* kind of a “hearer” I am. In that parable, Christ likened those who hear the Word unto various sorts of ground upon which seeds fall. He divided them into four different classes. Three out of the four brought no fruit to perfection. That is exceedingly solemn and searching. In one case, the devil catches away the good seed out of the heart (Luk 8:12). In another case, they “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luk 8:13). In another case, they are “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luk 8:14). Are you, my reader, described in one of these? Do not ignore this question, we beg you. Face it honestly and make sure *which* of the various soils represent *your* heart.

But there are some “good ground” hearers. And *how are they to be identified?* What did the infallible Son of God say of them? How did He describe them? Did He say, “That on the good ground are they who rest on the Word of God and doubt not His promises; are thoroughly persuaded they are saved, and yet go on living the same kind of life as previously”? No, He did not. Instead, He declared, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luk 8:15). Ah, dear readers, the test is *fruit*, not knowledge, not boastings, not orthodoxy, not joy, but FRUIT, and *such* “fruit” as mere nature cannot produce. It is the fruit of the Vine, namely, *likeness to Christ*, being conformed to His image. May the Holy Spirit search each one of us.



Holy Bridegroom, glorious Head,
Of Thy beloved Bride,
By Thee may I be daily fed,
And nourish'd by Thy side;
Forsaking all the worthless toys
Of vain carnality;
Tasting of everlasting joys,
And immortality.

Fix Thy great love within my heart,
That I may give Thee praise;
And never let me more depart
From Thy most holy ways.
Plainly showing to all around
That I am Thine indeed;
That grace may over sin abound,
As of the holy seed.

Lord Jesus, set our hearts on fire
With Thy unchanging love,
That through Thy grace we may aspire
To reign with Thee above.
Let us not sleep, as others do,
But earnest be in prayer;
Looking for and hast'ning to
Our meeting in the air.

Edward Kirby, 1871

