

The Spirit Enlightening

A dead man can neither see nor hear: true alike naturally and spiritually. There must be *life* before there can be perception: the Spirit must quicken the soul before it be capable of discerning and being affected by Divine things in a spiritual way. We say “in a *spiritual* way,” because even a blind man may obtain an accurate idea of objects which his eye has never beheld; even so the unregenerate may acquire a natural knowledge of Divine things. But there is a far greater difference between an unregenerate man’s knowledge of Divine things—no matter how orthodox and Scriptural be his views—and the knowledge possessed by the regenerate, than there is between a blind man’s conception of a gorgeous sunset and what it would appear to him were sight communicated and he was permitted to gaze upon one himself. It is not merely that the once-blind man would have a more correct conception of the Creator’s handiwork, but the *effect produced upon him* would be such as words could not describe.

The Spirit’s quickening of the dead soul into newness of life lays the foundation for all His consequent operations. Once the soul is made the recipient of spiritual life, all its faculties are capacitated unto spiritual exercises: the understanding to perceive spiritually, the conscience to feel spiritually, the affections to move spiritually, and the will to act spiritually. Originally, God formed man’s body out of the dust of the ground, and it then existed as a complete organism, being endowed with a full set of organs and members; but it was not until God “breathed into” him the “breath of *life*” (Gen. 2:7) that Adam was able to move and act. In like manner, the soul of the natural man is vested with all these faculties which distinguish him from the beasts, but it is not until the Spirit *quickens* him that he is capable of discerning and being affected by Divine things in a spiritual way.

Once the Spirit has brought one of God’s dead elect on to resurrection ground He proceeds to illumine him. The light of God now shines upon him, and the previously-blind soul having been Divinely empowered to see, is able to *receive* that light. The Spirit’s enlightenment commences immediately after quickening, continues throughout the Christian’s life, and is consummated in glory: “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18). As we stated in a previous article, the spiritual enlightenment is not a mere informing of the mind or communication of spiritual knowledge, but is an experimental and efficacious consciousness of the Truth. It is that which is spoken of in 1 John 2:20, 27, “But ye have *an unction* from the Holy One, and ye *know* all things. . . . But *the anointing* which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.”

By this “anointing” or enlightenment the quickened soul is enabled to perceive the true nature of sin—opposition against God expressed in self-pleasing. By it he discerns the plague of his own heart, and finds that he is a moral leper, totally depraved, corrupt at the very center of his being. By it he detects the deceptions of Satan, which formerly made him believe that bitter was sweet, and sweet bitter. By it he apprehends the claims of God: that He is absolutely worthy of and infinitely entitled to be loved with *all* the heart, soul and strength. By it he learns God’s *way of* salvation: that the path of practical holiness is the only one which leads to Heaven. By it he beholds the perfect suitability and sufficiency of Christ: that He is the only One who could meet all God’s claims upon him. By it he feels his own impotency unto all that is good and presents himself as an

empty vessel to be filled out of Christ's fulness.

A Divine light now shines into the quickened soul. Before, he was "darkness," but now is he "light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). He now perceives that those things in which he once found pleasure are loathsome and damnable. His former conceits of the world and its enjoyments, he now sees to be erroneous and ensnaring, and apprehends that no real happiness or contentment is to be found in any of them. That holiness of heart and strictness of life which before he criticized as needless preciseness or puritanic extremeness, is now looked upon not only as absolutely necessary, but as most beautiful and blessed. Those moral and religious performances he once prided himself in and which he supposed merited the approval of God, he now regards as filthy rags. Those whom he once envied he now pities. The company he once delighted in, now sickens and saddens him. His whole outlook is completely changed.

Divine illumination, then, is the Holy Spirit imparting to the quickened soul accurate and spiritual views of Divine things. To hear and *understand* is peculiar to the "good-ground" hearer (Matt. 13:23). None but the *real* "disciple" *knows* the Truth (John 8:31, 32). Even the Gospel is "hid" from the lost (2 Cor. 4:4). But when a quickened soul is enlightened by the Spirit, he has a feeling realization of the excellency of the Divine character, the spirituality of God's Law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general and of his own vileness in particular. It is a Divine work which capacitates the soul to have real communion with God to receive or take in spiritual objects, enjoy them, and live upon them. It is in this way that Christ is "formed *in us*" (Gal. 4:19). Thus, at times, the Christian is able to say:

"Thy shining grace can cheer
This dungeon where I dwell.
'Tis paradise when Thou are here,
If Thou depart, 'tis hell."

In closing, let us seek to define a little more definitely some of the characteristics of this Divine enlightenment. First, it is one which gives *certainty* to the soul. It enables its favoured possessor to say "One thing I *know*, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25); and again, "I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). Later, Satan may be permitted to inject unbelieving and atheistical thoughts into his mind, but it is utterly impossible for him to *persuade* any quickened and enlightened soul that God has no existence, that Christ is a myth, that the Scriptures are a human invention. God in Christ has become a living reality to him, and the more He appears to the soul the sum of all excellency, the more He is loved.

Second, this Divine enlightenment is *transforming*. Herein it differs radically from a natural knowledge of Divine things, such as the unregenerate may acquire intellectually, but which produces no real and lasting impression upon the soul. A spiritual apprehension of Divine things is an efficacious one, stamping the image thereof upon the heart, and moulding it into their likeness. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are *changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus this spiritual illumination is vastly different from a mere notional and inoperative knowledge of Divine things. The Spirit's enlightenment enables the Christian to "*show forth* the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Third, this Divine enlightenment is a spiritual *preservative*. This is evident from 1 John 2:20, though to make it fully clear unto the reader an exposition of that verse in the light of its context is required. In 1 John 2:18 the Apostle had mentioned the “many anti-christs” (to be headed up in *the* antichrist), which were to characterize this final dispensation: seducers from the Faith were numerous even before the close of the first century A.D. In 1 John 2:19 reference is made unto those who had fallen under the spell of these deceivers, and who had in consequence, apostatised from Christianity. In sharp contrast therefrom, the Apostle affirms, “*But ye* have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (v. 20). Here was the Divine preservative: the Spirit’s enlightenment ensured the saints from being captured by Satan’s emissaries. Apostates had never been anointed by the Spirit; renewed souls are, and this safeguards them. The voice of a stranger “will they not follow” (John 10:5). It is not possible to fatally “deceive” one of God’s elect (Matt. 24:24). The same precious truth is found again in 1 John 2:27: the Spirit indwells the Christian “for ever” (John 14:16), hence the “anointing” he has received “*abideth* in him” and thus guarantees that he shall “abide in Christ.”—A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

80. *The Pinnacle of Faith*: 11:35, 36.

In his lengthy but most blessed description of the Life of Faith, the Spirit of God has, in Hebrews 11, passed from one phase of it to another, exhibiting to our view its many-sidedness. But there was one other aspect thereof which required to be delineated in order to give completeness to the whole, and that we have designated the “pinnacle” of faith, for to *suffer* for God, to meekly endure whatever affliction He is pleased to put upon us, to lay down our lives for the sake of His Truth if called upon to do so, is the highest point which faith can reach. Therefore, in the text which is now to engage our attention, He moved the Apostle to pass on to an entirely different sort of the fruits of faith from those mentioned in the preceding verses, and shows us the power of faith to support the soul under sufferings, even the acutest afflictions to which the human mind and body can be subjected.

“For hearing of these great and glorious things, they might be apt to think that they were not so immediately concerned in them. For *their* condition was poor, persecuted, exposed to all evils, and death itself, for the profession of the Gospel. Their interest, therefore, was to inquire what help in, what relief from faith they might expect in that condition? What will faith do where men are to be oppressed, persecuted and slain? Wherefore, the Apostle, applying himself directly unto their condition, with what they suffered and further feared on the account of their profession of the Gospel; he produceth a multitude of examples, as so many testimonies unto the power of faith in safe-guarding and preserving the souls of believers under the greatest sufferings that human nature can be exposed unto” (John Owen).

Not only were these instances of the sufferings of the Old Testament saints pertinent to the circumstances the Hebrew Christians of Paul’s time were in, but *we* too need to be informed of what faith in God and fidelity to His Truth may entail. At the outset of the Christian life we are bidden to first sit down and “count the cost” (Luke 14:28), which means that we are required to contemplate those sufferings which the following of Christ is likely to involve, and it is well that we should frequently remind ourselves that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It is criminal silence on the part of any servant of God *to conceal from his hearers* that a true profession of the name of Christ will necessarily bring down upon us not only the scorn and opposition of the outside world, but also the hatred and persecution of the false religious world. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

The Lord Jesus Christ dealt openly in this matter, and plainly made known what was likely to befall those whom He called to follow Him, and expressly affirmed that He would admit none into the ranks of *His* disciples save those who denied themselves, took up their *cross*, and engaged to undergo all sorts of sufferings for His sake and the Gospel’s. He deceived none with fair promises of a smooth and easy passage through this world. So too does His faithful Apostle, in the verses which are to be before us, after setting before the Hebrews some of the grand and glorious achievements which the faith of their predecessors had wrought, now reminds them of *others* who were called upon to exercise *their* faith in the greatest miseries that could be undergone. Great trials and sore afflictions are to be expected in the path of faith. The Saviour Himself encountered them, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

“All the evils here enumerated, did befall the persons intended, on the account of their *faith*, and the profession thereof. The Apostle does not present unto the Hebrews a company of miserable, distressed creatures that fell into that state through their own default, or merely on the account of common providence, disposing their lot in this world into such a state of misery, as it is with many; but all the things mentioned, they underwent merely and solely on the account of their faith in God, and the profession of true religion. So as that their case differed in nothing from that which they might be called unto” (John Owen).

But not only were these sufferings encountered in the path of fidelity to God, but it was the exercise of *faith* which enabled those Old Testament worthies to patiently and spiritually endure them. Faith is a grace which draws down from Heaven whatever blessing of God is most needful to the saint, and therefore does it stand him in as good stead in the night of adversity as in the day of prosperity. Faith is a new-creation principle in the soul which not only energises its possessor to perform exploits, but it also enables him to hold his head above the dark waters when floods threaten to drown him. Faith suffices the Christian to face danger calmly, to continue steadfast in duty when menaced by the most foreboding outlook, to stand his ground when threatened with sorest sufferings. Faith imparts a steadfastness of purpose, a noble courage, a tranquillity of mind, which no human education or fleshly efforts can supply. Faith makes the righteous as bold as a lion, refusing to recant though horrible tortures and a martyr’s death be the only alternative.

Faith gives its possessor patience under adversities, for by faith he sees them in a Scriptural light and bears them by the enabling strength of Christ. How good and profitable is a sanctified affliction, but then only is it sanctified to us when faith is “mixed with” it. When faith is not in exercise, the heart is occupied with the things which are seen and temporal: only the creature’s hand or the creature’s treachery is viewed, and peevishness and resentment prevail; or worst still, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts against God, and to say “the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” But when the Spirit renews us in the inner man, and faith becomes active again, how differently do things then appear! Then we take ourselves to task and say, “Why art thou cast down O my soul, hope thou in God.”

It belongs entirely unto the sovereign pleasure of God to order and dispose the outward conditions through which His Church passes upon earth: seasons of prosperity and times of adversity are regulated by Him as He deems best. Eras of peace and security and eras of persecution and peril are interchangeable, like day and night, summer and winter. Yet God does not act arbitrarily. It was not until after Abraham left Bethel and its altar, and journeyed southward (Egypt-wards) that there arose a famine in the land (Gen. 12:8-10). It was only when Israel “forsook the LORD God of their fathers . . . and followed other gods,” that His anger was kindled against them, and “He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about” (Judg. 2:11-14). It was only when men “slept” that He suffered the Enemy to sow “tares” among the wheat (Matt. 13:25). It was after Ephesus *left* her “first love” that the Smyrean era of persecution was experienced (Rev. 2:4 and 9, 10). And it is because so many of the professing servants of God repudiated His Law during the previous generation that we are now plagued with a reign of lawlessness in the church, home, and state.

God will not be mocked, and in His righteous government He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, and hence it is that seasons of prosperity are followed by seasons of adversity. Yet during these seasons of adversity, whether they take the form of spiritual dearth or of physical peril, the godly remnant who sigh and cry because of the abominations which are found in what are termed the public “places of worship,” or who meekly endure the persecutions of hypocritical professors or of the openly ungodly world, are no less acceptable with God, and are *as precious in His sight* as those whose lot was previously cast in times of the greatest earthly felicity.

The darker the night the more evident the few stars twinkling between the clouds. The more awful be the state of professing Christendom as a whole, the more suitable is the background for the children of God to display their colours. The fiercer be the opposition made against a spiritual faith, the grander the opportunity for bringing forth its choicest fruit. There is no higher aspect of faith than that which brings the heart to patiently submit unto whatever God sends us, to meekly acquiesce unto His sovereign will, to say “the cup which My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Oftentimes the faith which *suffers* is greater than the faith that can boast an open triumph. Love “beareth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7), and faith when it reaches the pinnacle of attainment declares, “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

“There is as much glory unto a spiritual eye, in the catalogue of the effects of faith that follow, as in that which went before. The church is no less beautiful and glorious when encompassed, and seemingly overwhelmed with all the evils and dreadful miseries here recounted, than when it is in the greatest peace and prosperity. To look, indeed, only on the outside of them gives a terrible undesirable prospect. But to see faith and love to God, working effectually under them all, to see comforts retained, yea, consolations abounding, holiness prompted, God glorified, the world condemned, the souls of men profited, and at length triumphant over all; this is beautiful and glorious . . .

“It may also be observed that the Apostle takes most of these instances, if not all of them, from the time of the persecution of the church under Antiochus, the king of Syria, in the days of the Maccabees. And we may consider concerning this season: 1. That it was after the closing of the canon of Scripture, or putting of the last hand unto writings by Divine inspiration under the Old Testament. Wherefore, as the Apostle represented these things from the notoriety of fact then fresh in memory, and it may be, some books then written of those things, like the books of the Maccabees, yet remaining; yet as they are delivered out unto the church *by him*, they proceeded from Divine inspiration. 2. That in those days wherein these things fell out, there was no extraordinary prophet in the church. Prophecy, as the Jews confess, ceased under the second temple. And this makes it evident that the rule of the Word, and the ordinary ministry of the church, *is sufficient* to maintain believers in their duty against all oppositions whatever. 3. That this last persecution of the church under the Old Testament by Antiochus, was typical of the last persecution of the Christian church under antichrist; as is evident to all that compare Daniel 8:10-14, 23-25; 11:36-39 with that of the Revelation in sundry places. And indeed the martyrologies of those who have suffered under the Roman antichrist are a better exposition of this context than any that can be given in words” (J. Owen).

“Women received their dead raised to life again” (Heb. 11:35). Some have complained, because this clause is not placed at the end of verse 34, urging that it belongs there much more appropriately than it does at the beginning of verse 35, being a fitting

climax to the miraculous achievements of faith enumerated in verses 33, 34. While it be true that the particular item here before us belongs to the same class of miracles found in the preceding verse, yet personally we regard it as suitable for placing at the head of what follows in verses 35-38, for it forms a suitable *transition* from the one to the other. And in this respect: those women passed through the sufferings of a sore bereavement before they had their beloved children restored to them—a reward for their kindness unto God’s servants.

“Women received their dead raised to life again.” The historical reference is to what is recorded in 1 Kings 17:22-24 and 2 Kings 4:35-37. How those remarkable cases show us once more that there is nothing too hard or difficult for *faith* to effect when it works according to the revealed will of God! But what is the *spiritual* application of this unto us today? Is it not faith’s seeking the Spirit’s renewal of languishing graces? the practical heeding of that word “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die” (Rev. 3:2)! Or, to take a more extreme case, is it not a word of hope to the backslidden Christian, who has to all appearances lapsed back into a state of unregeneracy? Is it not faith’s response to that word (addressed to Christians) “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14)!

“And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance” (v. 35). It is very touching to remember that the hand which first penned those words had taken a prominent part in inflicting torture upon the saints of God (Acts 8:3, 9:1), but, by grace, he was now a *sharer* of them (2 Cor. 11:24-27). The word “torture” here signifies “were racked”: those Old Testament saints were fastened to a device and then a wrench was turned which caused their joints to be pulled out of their sockets—a method of torture frequently resorted to by fiendish Romanists when seeking to force Protestants to recant. By this fearful form of suffering the graces of God’s people were tested and tried.

“Not accepting deliverance.” It was offered to them, but at the price of apostasy. Two alternatives were set before them: disloyalty to the Lord, or enduring the most excruciating suffering; surrender of the Truth, or being tortured by devils in human form. Freedom from this torture was offered to them in return for forsaking their profession. This is expressly affirmed of Eliezer and his seven brethren in 2 Maccabees. Yea, they were not only offered freedom from tortures and death, but promised great rewards and promotions, which they steadfastly refused. The *principal* design of Satan in setting torture before God’s saints is not to slay their bodies, but is to *destroy their souls*. Space has always been given to the victim for consideration and recantation: entreaties have been mingled with threats to induce a renouncing of their profession.

Thus, the real test presented was which did these saints of God esteem more highly: the present comfort of their bodies or the eternal interests of their souls? Let it be remembered that they were men and women of like passions with us: their bodies were made of the same tender and sensitive flesh as ours are, but such was the care they had for their souls, so genuine was their faith and hope in a better resurrection, that they listened not to the appeals and whinings of the outward man. The *same* issue is drawn, though in another form, today: alas, what countless millions of people lose their souls eternally for the temporary gratification of their vile bodies. Reader, which do you esteem the more highly: your body or your soul? Your *actions* supply the answer: which receives the more thought, care, and attention; *which* is “denied,” and *which* is catered unto?

“Not accepting deliverance.” The word for “deliverance” here is commonly translated

“redemption” in the New Testament: its usage in this verse helps to a clearer understanding of that important term, and emphasizes the difference between it and “ransom.” “Ransom” is the paying of the price which justice requires, but “redemption” is the actual emancipation of the one for whom the price was paid. These saints refused to accept a temporal “redemption” or “deliverance,” because to have done so on the terms it was proffered to them would have meant the renunciation of their profession, apostasy from God. It was “through *faith*” they made this noble decision; it was love for the truth, which caused them to hold fast that which was infinitely dearer to them than an escape from bodily suffering. They had “bought the Truth,” at the price of turning their backs on the world and their former religious friends, and bringing down upon themselves the scorn and hatred of them. And now they refused to “sell the Truth” (Prov. 23:23) out of a mere regard to bodily ease.

“Not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection”: that last clause shows the *ground* of their steadfastness. The primary force of the expression *here* is a figurative one, as the verse as a whole clearly shows: they were offered a “resurrection” on the condition of their recantation, namely a “resurrection” from reproach to honour, from poverty to riches, from pain to ease and pleasure—it was a “resurrection” from the physical torture which threatened them: compare Hebrews 11:19. But their hearts were occupied with something far, far better than being raised up to earthly comforts and honours; their faith anticipated that morning without clouds, when their bodies would be raised in glory, made like Christ’s, and taken to be with Him forever. It was the hope of *that* which supported their souls in the face of extreme peril and sustained them under acutest sufferings.

“That they might obtain a better resurrection.” In passing, let it be noted that God had set before the *Old* Testament saints the hope of resurrection—they were not nearly so ignorant as the dispensationalists make them out to be, in fact were far wiser than most of our moderns. Resurrection has always been the topstone in the building of faith (Job 19:25, 26), that which promised eternal reward, and that which gave life unto their obedience. A further proof of this fact is found in Acts 24:14-16: the faith of the “fathers” embraced “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” That glorious resurrection will more than compensate for any bodily denials or bodily sufferings which the Christian makes or experiences for Christ’s sake.

“And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment” (Heb. 11:36). This verse supplies further details of what some of the Old Testament saints were called upon to suffer for their fidelity to the Truth, sufferings which have been frequently duplicated during this Christian era. We are here informed of the various methods which the enemies of God employed in the afflicting of His people; no stone was left unturned in the persevering and merciless efforts to produce a denial of the Faith. While these things are harrowing to our feelings, yet they also serve to make manifest the sufficiency of Divine grace to support its recipients under most painful trials, and should evoke thanksgiving and praise unto Him that is able to make the weak stand up under the fiercest assaults of the Enemy.

“And others had trial of cruel mockings.” Let us, when we are reproached for Christ’s sake and ridiculed because of our adherence to God’s truth, call to mind that *this* was the *mildest* form of suffering which many who went before us on the pilgrim path were called upon to endure! The sneers and unkind words of our foes are not worthy of a pang

in comparison with the far sorer pains which other believers have had to bear. It has ever been the portion of God's servants and people to be derided, reproached and insulted: see Galatians 4:29, 2 Chronicles 36:16, Jeremiah 20:7, Lamentations 3:14; and my reader, if *we* are not being "mocked"—sneered at, scoffed at—it is because we are too lax in our ways and too worldly in our walk. Human nature has not changed; Satan has not changed; the world has not changed; and the more Christlike is our life the more we shall drink—in our measure—of the cup He drank from.

"And scourgings." The reference is to the lashings of their backs with whipcords of wire, which were most painful to experience, for they lacerated the flesh, drew blood, and mascerated the body. It was not only a painful form of suffering, but a most humiliating one as well, for "scourgings" were reserved for the basest and most degenerate of men. The Lord Jesus was subjected to this form of ignominy and suffering from His enemies (Matt. 27:26), and so also were His Apostles (Acts 5:40, 16:23). It is true that *we* are now (for the immediate present) spared these corporeal "scourgings," but there is such a thing as being lashed by the tongue and harrowed in our minds; nevertheless, happy are we (Matt. 5:10-12) if we are so honoured as to experience a little fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. But let us see well to it that we do not retaliate: ponder carefully and turn into earnest prayer Psalm 38:12-14; 1 Peter 2:21-23.

"Yea, moreover of bonds." The reference is to cords, chains, manacles and fetters, binding them fast, so that they could not run away. In this item we see how "the excellent" of the earth (Psa. 16:3) were basely dealt with as though they had been the vilest of malefactors. Does your heart go out in pity to them, dear reader? Ah, what if *you* are "bound" even now with something far, far worse than outer and material ropes and chains! Multitudes are held fast by habits they cannot break; their souls are fettered by iniquities from which they cannot free themselves. Sin has taken them captive, and has full dominion over them. Has it over you? Or, has Christ set you free—not from the hateful presence of indwelling sin, but from its reigning power. Daily ought we to pray and strive against everything which limits us spiritually.

"And imprisonments," which was the lot commonly apportioned to robbers and murderers. Here again we see the saints of God treated as the offscouring of the earth, and let it be remembered that the prisons of those days were of a far different order from the comfortable buildings in which criminals are now incarcerated. One has only to read the experience of Jeremiah 38:11-13 to get some idea of the meaning of this word in our text: God's children were thrown into dark and damp dungeons, far below the level of the earth, unheated, unpaved, unilluminated. One cannot read this clause in our text without thinking of dear Bunyan. Ah, my reader, nothing but a *real* faith in the living God could have enabled those believers to have remained faithful unto death. The whole of the verses which have been before us exhibit the efficacy and *sufficiency* of a spiritual faith to endure the worst that men and devils could inflict upon its favoured possessors. Is *yours* only an easy-chair "faith"?—A.W.P.

The Life of David

32. His Failure.

In our last article (so far as the application of the principles enunciated therein related to him who is the principal subject of this series) we endeavored to show that very much hinged on the manner in which David now conducted himself. A most important crisis had been reached in his life. The time which he spent at Hebron constituted the dividing-line in his career. On the one side of it was what we may designate as the period of his rejection, when the great majority of the people clave unto Saul, who hounded him from pillar to post; on the other side of it was the period of his exaltation when he reigned over the nation. When pondering the different events which happened in the first stage of his career, we sought to point out the moral connection between them, seeking to trace the relation between the personal conduct of David and the various circumstances which the governmental dealings with God brought about as the sequel. We propose, by Divine aid, to follow a similar procedure in taking up the details under the second stage of his career.

In article 20 we saw how David displeased the Lord by his taking unto himself two wives (1 Sam. 25:43, 44), and in article 22 we noticed how one sin led to another; while in article 24 we observed the Divine chastisement which followed. In article 26 we dwelt upon David's putting things right with God and encouraging himself in the Lord, following which we traced out the blessed results which ensued (articles 27, 28), terminating in his being restored to full fellowship with the Lord, as was typified by God's directing him to "Hebron." There he received a "token for good" (Psa. 86:17) in the reception which he met with from the men of his own tribe, who came and "anointed David king over the house of Judah" (2 Sam. 2:4): that was indeed a promising intimation that if his ways continued to please the Lord, He would make "even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). On the other hand, that "token for good" only becomes the more solemn in the light of all that follows.

How much there is in the later chapters of 2 Samuel which makes such pathetic and tragic reading. Few men have experienced such sore social and domestic trials as David did. Not only was he caused much trouble by political traitors in his kingdom, but what was far more painful, the members of his own family brought down heavy grief upon him. His favourite wife turned against him (6:20-22), his daughter Tamar was raped by her half brother (13:14), his son Amnon was murdered (13:28, 29). His favourite son Absalom sought to wrest the kingdom from him, and then was murdered (18:14). Before his death, another of his sons, Adonijah, sought to obtain the throne (1 Kings 1:5), and he too was murdered (1 Kings 2:24, 25). Inasmuch as the Lord never afflicts willingly (Lam. 3:33), but only as our sins occasion it, how are these most painful family afflictions to be accounted for?

If the Holy Spirit has been pleased to furnish us with any explanation of the sore trials which David encountered in his later life, or if He has supplied us with materials that serve to throw light upon what is recorded in the second half of 2 Samuel, then that explanation must be sought for or that illuminating material must be enquired after, in the *early* chapters of that book. That is a principle of great importance in order to a right understanding of the Scriptures. As a general rule, God hangs the key for us right on the door itself: in other words, the opening chapters (often the first verses) contain a clear intimation or forecast of what follows. True, in some cases, this is more apparent than in others, yet concerning each one of the sixty-six books of the Bible, it will be found that

the closer be the attention given unto its introduction, the easier will it be to follow the development of its theme. Such is obviously the case here in 2 Samuel.

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker” (2 Sam. 3:1). The battle referred to at the end of the previous chapter, though it went so greatly in favour of David, did not put an end to the warfare between him and Ishbosheth. Though Saul himself was no more, yet his son and subjects refused to quietly submit to David’s sceptre. For another five years they continued to manifest their defiance, and many were the skirmishes which took place between his men and the loyal subjects of David. The latter was loath to employ harsh measures against them, and probably his magnanimity and mildness were mistaken for weakness or fear, and encouraged his opponents to renew their efforts for his overthrow. But little by little they were weakened, until Ishbosheth was willing to make a league with David.

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.” The contents of this verse may well be taken as a type of the conflict which is experienced in the heart of the Christian. David, exalted to be king over Judah, may be regarded as a figure of one of God’s elect when he has been lifted out of the miry clay (into which the fall of Adam plunged him) and his feet set upon the Rock of Ages. As 1 Samuel 2:8 declares, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dung-hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.” But is all now henceforth peace and joy? Far from it. Inward corruption is there, and is ever assailing the principle of grace which was imparted at regeneration: “the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). What is the outcome? Is the flesh victorious? No, it may annoy, it may win minor skirmishes, but little by little the flesh is weakened and the spirit strengthened, until at the last sin is completely destroyed.

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David.” Thus the kingdom of Israel was rent asunder by civil war. That it should last so long, when David was clearly in the right, has presented quite a problem to the commentators. Personally, we regard the contents of this verse as a plain intimation *that David was missing God’s best*. This is an expression we use rather frequently in these pages, so perhaps a definition of it here will not be amiss. For the benefit of our Calvinistic friends (and the editor is not ashamed to confess that he is a “high Calvinist”), let it be pointed out that it is by no means equivalent to affirming that God’s counsel may be thwarted by us. No indeed, puny man can no more defeat the eternal purpose of the Almighty than he can cause the sun to cease from shining or the ocean from rolling. “But our God is in the heavens: He hath done *whatsoever* He hath pleased” (Psa. 115:3).

There is a vast difference between the *promises* of God and His eternal *decrees*: many of the former are conditional, whereas the latter are immutable, dependent upon nothing for their fulfillment save the omnipotence of God. In saying that many of the Divine promises recorded in Holy Writ are “conditional” we do not mean they are uncertain and unreliable, no; we mean that they are infallible declarations of what God will do or give *providing* we follow a certain course of conduct: just as the Divine threats recorded in Scripture are declarations of what God will do or inflict *if* a certain course be pursued. For example, God has declared “Them that honour Me I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30). But suppose we *fail* to “honour” God, suppose we do not obtain that enabling grace which He

is ever ready to give unto those who earnestly seek it in a right way—what then? The same verse tells us: “And they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

Take for instance the declaration made in Joshua 1:8, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for *then* thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and *then* thou shalt have good success.” First, let it be pointed out that that verse has nothing whatever to do with the eternal destiny of the soul; instead, it relates only to the present life of the saint. In it God tells us *if* we give His Holy Word the first place in our thoughts and affections, and regulate both our inner and outer life by its teaching, *then* He will make our way “prosperous” and we shall have “good success.” This does not mean that we shall become millionaires, but that by heeding the rules of His Word we shall escape those rocks upon which the vast majority of our fellows make shipwreck, and that the *blessing of God* will rest upon our lives in all their varied aspects and relations; an all-wise and sovereign God determining both the kind and measure of the “success” which will be most for His glory and our highest good.

Nor are the principals enunciated in Joshua 1:8 to be restricted in their application to those who lived under the old covenant: inasmuch as the governmental ways of God remain the same in all ages, those principles hold good in all dispensations. From the beginning of human history it has always been true, and to the end of history it will continue so to be, that “no good thing will He withhold from *them that walk uprightly*” (Psa. 84:11). On the other hand, it is equally a fact that those who are not subject to God’s Word, who follow instead the devices of their own hearts and give way to the lusts of the flesh, suffer adversity and come under the rod of Divine chastisement; of them it has to be said, “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer. 5:25). In other words, they have missed God’s best: not that they have failed to obtain any blessing which He had eternally decreed should be theirs, but they have not entered into the good of what God’s Word promises should be the *present* portion of those who walk in obedience thereto.

“Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto Him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee” (Psa. 81:13-16). What could be plainer than that! Those verses need present no difficulty to the high Calvinist, nor is there anything in them which will support the Arminian delusion that having created men free moral agents, God is unable to do with and for them what He desires, without reducing them to mere machines. This passage is not treating of the eternal counsels of God, but of His governmental dealings with men in this life.

The key to the above verses is found in their immediate context: “But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psa. 81:11, 12). The children of Israel walked contrary—not to the eternal purpose of Jehovah, but—to His revealed will. They would not submit to the rules laid down in God’s Word, but in their self-will and self-pleading determined to have their own way; in consequence, *they missed God’s best for them in this life*. Instead of His subduing their enemies, He allowed those enemies to subdue them; instead of providing abundant harvests, He sent them fam-

ines; instead of giving them pastors after His own heart, He suffered false prophets to deceive.

Many more are the passages which might be quoted from the Old and New Testament alike, which set forth the same great fact, warning us that if we walk contrary to the Scriptures we shall certainly suffer for it, both in soul and body, both in our estate and circumstances, in this life; failing to enter into those blessings—spiritual and temporal—which the Word promises to those who are in subjection to it. That is as true today as it was under the old economy, and it supplies the key to many a problem, and explains much in God’s governmental dealings with us. It certainly supplies the key to David’s life, and explains why the chastening rod of God fell so heavily upon himself and his family. Bear in mind carefully what has been said above, read the passage which now follows, and then there is no reason why we should be surprised at all that is found unto the end of 2 Samuel.

“And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David’s wife. These were born to David in Hebron” (2 Sam. 3:2-5). In the light of all that has been said in the preceding article and in this one up to here, there is little need for us to attempt any lengthy comments upon these unpleasant verses. Here we see David giving way to the lust of the flesh, and practicing polygamy; and as he sowed to the flesh in his family life, so in the flesh he reaped corruption in his family. Three of the above-mentioned sons were murdered!

The subject of polygamy as a whole is too large a one for us to deal with here, nor can we discuss it at length as it bore upon the lives of the different patriarchs. God’s original creation of only one man and one woman indicated from the beginning that monogamy was the Divine order for man to heed (Matt. 19: 4, 5). The first of whom we read in Scripture that had more wives than one was Lamech (Gen. 4:19), who was of the evil line of Cain. And while Moses, because of the hardness of Israel’s heart (Matt. 19:8) introduced the statute of divorce, yet nowhere did the Mosaic law sanction a plurality of wives. The limitation of one wife only is plainly suggested by such Scriptures as Proverbs 5:18 and 18:22.

“Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself . . . *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself*, that his heart turn not away” (Deut. 17:15-17). Here was a definite and express law which the *kings* of Israel were required to obey, and thereby set before their subjects an example of sobriety and marital fidelity. And this was the commandment which David so flagrantly disobeyed, for no sooner was he anointed “king over the house of Judah” (2 Sam. 2:4), than he began to *multiply* “wives” unto himself (3:2-5). Not only so, but when Abner sought to make a league with him, David laid it down as a condition that his first wife, Michal, who had been given to another man (1 Sam. 25:44) must be restored to him (2 Sam. 3:13), which was an open violation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

A little later on we read, “And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron” (2 Sam. 5:13). Here, then, was David’s beset-

ting sin, to which he yielded so freely—little wonder that his son Solomon followed in his footsteps! And a holy God will not tolerate evil, least of all in those whom He has made leaders over His people. Though in the main David's life was pleasing to God, and though he was endowed with so many spiritual excellencies, yet there was this one sad weakness. His giving way to it brought down long and sever chastenings, and the record of it as a whole—the sowing and the consequent reaping— is for our learning and warning. Learn, then, dear reader, that even when restored from backsliding and brought back to fellowship with God, your only safety lies in earnestly crying to Him daily “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa. 119:117).—A.W.P.

The Divine Covenants

2. *The Everlasting Covenant.*

The Word of God opens with a brief account of creation, the making of man, and his fall; but from later Scriptures we have no difficulty in ascertaining that the issue of the trial to which man was subjected in Eden had been Divinely foreseen. “The Lamb slain (in the purpose of God) from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8) makes it clear that, in view of the Fall, provision had been made by God for the recovery of His people, who had apostatised in Adam, and that the means whereby their recovery would be effected were consistent with the claims of the Divine holiness and justice. All the details and results of the Plan of Mercy had been arranged and settled from the beginning of Divine wisdom.

That provision of grace which God made for His people before the foundation of the world embraced the appointment of His own Son to become the Mediator, and of the work which, in that capacity, He should perform—involving His assumption of human nature, the offering of Himself as a sacrifice for sin, His exaltation in the nature He had assumed to the right hand of God in the heavenlies, His supremacy over His Church, and over all things for His Church, the blessings which He should be empowered to dispense, and the extent to which His work should be made effectual unto the salvation of souls. These were all matters of definite and certain arrangement, agreed upon between God and His Son in the terms of the Everlasting Covenant.

The first germinal publication of the Everlasting Covenant is found in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Thus, immediately after the Fall, God announced to the Serpent his ultimate doom through the work of the Mediator, and revealed unto sinners the Channel through which alone salvation could flow to them. The continual additions which God subsequently made to the revelation He gave in Genesis 3:15, were, for a considerable time, largely through *covenants* which He made with the fathers, which covenants were both *the fruit of* His eternal Plan of Mercy, and the gradual *revealing of* the same unto the faithful. Only as those two facts are clearly recognized and held fast by us are we in any position to appreciate and perceive the force of those subordinate “covenants.”

God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, David; but were *they*, as fallen creatures, able to enter into covenant with their august and holy Maker? Were they able to stand for themselves, or be sureties for others? The very question answers itself. What, for instance, could Noah possibly do which would insure that the earth should never again be destroyed by a flood? Those subordinate “covenants” were nothing more or less than the Lord’s *making manifest*, in an especial and public manner, the Grand Covenant: making known something of its glorious contents, confirming their own personal interest in it, and assuring them that Christ the great Covenant-Head should be of themselves and spring from their seed.

This it is which accounts for that singular expression which occurs so frequently in Scripture: “Behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you” (Gen. 9:9) and yet there follows no mention of any *conditions*, or work to be done by them, only a promise of unconditional blessings. And why? Because the “conditions” were to be fulfilled and the “work” was to be done *by Christ*, and nothing remained but to bestow the blessings on His people. So that when David says, “He hath made with me an

everlasting covenant” (2 Sam. 23:5) he simply means God had admitted him into an interest in the Everlasting Covenant and made him partaker of its privileges. Hence it is that when the Apostle Paul refers to the various “covenants” which God had made with men in Old Testament times, he styles them not “covenants of *stipulations*,” but “covenants of *promise*” (Eph. 2:12).

Above we have pointed out that the continual additions which God made to His original revelation of mercy in Genesis 3:15 were, for a while, given mainly through the “covenants” which He made with the fathers. It was a process of gradual development, issuing finally in the fulness of Gospel grace; the substance of those “covenants” indicated the outstanding stages in this process. They are the great landmarks of God’s dealings with men, points from which the disclosures of the Divine mind expanded into increased and established truths—revelations exhibiting in ever-augmented degrees of fulness and clearness of plan of salvation through the mediation and sacrifice of the Son of God; for each of those “covenants” consisted of gracious promises *ratified by sacrifice* (Gen. 8:20 and 9:9; 15:9-11 and 18). Thus, those “covenants” were so many intimations of that Method of Mercy which took its rise in the eternal counsels of the Divine mind.

Those Divine revelations and manifestations of the grace decreed in the Everlasting Covenant were given out at important epochs in the early history of the world. Just as Genesis 3:15 was given immediately after the Fall, so we find that immediately following the Flood God solemnly renewed the Covenant of Grace with Noah. In like manner, at the beginning of the third period of human history, following the Call of Abraham, God renewed it again, only then making a much fuller revelation of the same. It was now made known that the coming Deliverer of God’s people was to be of the Abrahamic stock and that all the families of the earth should be blessed in Him—a plain intimation of the calling of the Gentiles and the bringing of the elect from all nations into the family of God. In Genesis 15:5, 6, the great requirement of the covenant, namely, *faith*, was then more fully made known.

Unto Abraham God gave a remarkable pledge of the fulfillment of His covenant-promises in the striking victory which He granted him over the federated forces of Chedorlaomer, which was more than a hint of the victory of Christ and His seed over the world: carefully compare Isaiah 41:2, 3, 10, 15! Genesis 14:19, 20 supplies proof of what we have just said, for upon returning from his memorable victory, Abraham was met by Melchizedek (type of Christ) and was *blest* by him! A further revelation of the contents of the Covenant of Grace was granted unto Abraham in Genesis 15, where in the vision of the smoking furnace which passed through the midst of the sacrifice, an adumbration was made of the *sufferings* of Christ. In the miraculous birth of Isaac, intimation was given of the *supernatural birth* of Christ, the promised Seed. In the deliverance of Isaac from the altar representation was made of the *resurrection* of Christ (Heb. 11:19).

Thus we may see how fully the Covenant of Grace was revealed and confirmed unto the father of all them that believe, by the which he and his descendants obtained a clearer sight and understanding of the great Redeemer and the things which were to be accomplished by Him. And therefore did Christ take notice of this when He said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56)—the last words clearly intimating that Abraham had a definite spiritual apprehension of those things. Under the Siniatic Covenant a yet fuller revelation was made by God to His people of the contents of the Everlasting Covenant: the tabernacle and all its holy vessels; the high priest, his

vestments and service; and the whole system of sacrifices and ablutions, setting before them its blessed realities in typical forms, they being “patterns” of heavenly things.

Thus, before seeking to set forth the Everlasting Covenant itself in a specific way, we have first endeavoured to make clear *the relation borne to it* of the principal “covenants” which God was pleased to make with different men during the Old Testament era. Our sketch of them has necessarily been brief, for (D.V.) we shall take them up separately and consider them in fuller detail in the succeeding articles. Yet sufficient has been said, we trust, to demonstrate that, while the *terms* of the “covenants” which God made with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai, and with David, are to be understood, first, in their plain and natural sense, yet that it should be clear to any anointed eye that they have a second and higher meaning, a *spiritual* content—the things of earth being employed to represent heavenly things. In other words, those subordinate “covenants” need to be contemplated *both* in their “letter” and in their “spirit.”

Coming now more directly to the present aspect of our theme, let it be pointed out that, as there is no one verse in the Bible which expressly affirms there are three Divine persons in the Godhead, co-eternal, co-equal, co-glorious; nevertheless by carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture we know that such is the case. In like manner there is no one verse in the Bible which categorically states that the Father entered into a formal agreement with the Son: that on His executing a certain work, He should receive a certain reward; nevertheless, a careful study of different passages obliges us to arrive at this conclusion. The Holy Scriptures do not yield up their treasures to the indolent, and as long as the individual preacher is willing to let Dr. Scofield or Mr. Pink do his studying for him, he must not expect to make much progress in Divine things: ponder Proverbs 2:1-5!

There is no one plot of ground on earth on which will be found growing *all* varieties of flowers or trees, nor is there any part of the world in which may be secured representatives of every variety of butterflies: yet by expense, industry, and perseverance, the horticulturist and the natural-historian may gradually assemble together specimens of every variety until he possesses a complete collection. In like manner, there is no one chapter in the Bible in which *all* the truth is found on any subject: it is the part of the theologian to diligently attend unto the various hints and then the more definite contributions which he finds scattered throughout the Scriptures on any given theme, and carefully classify and co-ordinate them. Alas, that genuine and independent theologians (those unfettered by any human system) have well-nigh disappeared from the earth.

The language of the New Testament is very explicit in teaching us the true light in which the Plan of Mercy is to be viewed, and in showing the saint that he is to regard all his spiritual blessings and privileges as coming to him out of the Everlasting Covenant. It speaks of “The eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). Our covenant-oneness with Christ is clearly revealed in Ephesians 1:3-5, that marvelous declaration reaching its climax in 1:6 “to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” “Accepted *in* the Beloved” goes deeper and means far more than “accepted *through* Him”: it denotes not merely a recommendatory passport from Christ, but *a real union with Him*, whereby we are incorporated into His mystical Body, and made as truly partakers of His righteousness as the members of the physical body partake of the life which animates its head.

In like manner, there are many, many statements in the New Testament concerning Christ Himself which are only pertinent and intelligible in the light of His having acted in

fulfillment of a covenant-agreement with the Father. For example, in Luke 22:22 we find Him saying, “And truly the Son of man goeth, *as it was determined*”: “determined” when and where but in the Everlasting Covenant! Plainer still is the language in John 6:38, 39, “For I came down from Heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” Three things are there to be seen. First, that Christ had received a certain *charge* or commission from the Father. Second, that He had solemnly engaged and undertaken to execute that charge. Third, that the end contemplated in that arrangement was, not merely the *announcement* of spiritual blessings, but the actual *bestowal* of them upon all who had been given to Him.

Again, from John 10:16 it is evident that a specific charge had been laid upon Christ: referring to His elect scattered among the Gentiles, He said, not “them also I *will* bring,” but “them also I *MUST* bring.” In His high priestly prayer we hear Him saying, “Father, I *will* that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am” (John 17:24): there Christ was claiming something that was *due* Him on account of or in return for the work He had done (v. 4)—which clearly presupposes both an arrangement and a promise on the part of the Father. It was the Surety putting in His claim, and a “claim” necessarily implies a preceding promise annexed to a condition to be performed by the party to whom the promise is made, which gives a right to demand the reward; this is one reason why Christ, immediately afterward, addressed God as “*righteous Father*,” appealing to *His faithfulness* in the agreement.

Again, the parallel which is drawn between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 45-47 can only be satisfactorily interpreted on the principle that Adam and Christ were representative and federal heads of those whom the one involved in sin and death, and for whom the Other has secured righteousness and eternal life. “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2): but how could God *promise* eternal life *before* the world began on any other hypothesis than of a compact with the Son acting in the behalf of and for the benefit of His people? In Hebrews 3:2 it is said that the Apostle and High Priest of our profession “was *faithful* to Him that appointed Him”: now just as “obedience” implies a precept, so “faithfulness” presupposes *a trust*, that is, a pledge that a certain thing shall be done in accordance with the directions given him. But our present space is exhausted, and we must leave for our next article a further consideration of the Everlasting Covenant.—A.W.P.

The Providence of God

Carson on Esther

Let us here learn to trace the hand of God in the most trivial events. There is nothing fortuitous, nothing without God. Who would think of ascribing to God so seemingly an unimportant a matter? Yet this link is essential in the chain of the wonderful providences by which the Ruler of the world executed His plan on this memorable occasion. Take this away, and the whole chain is useless. Another night would have seen Mordecai on the gallows, or in the grave. This fact teaches us that there is nothing really casual as to God, even in a restless night of a human creature. How wonderful is the providence of Jehovah! how minute, how amazingly diversified are its operations! The eye of the Lord beholds, and His wisdom directeth, *all the events* with respect to *all the creatures* in the universe. This would be too much trouble, and too mean an employment, for the god of the philosophers. But the God of the Scripture not only created all things at first, and established laws by which He governs them, but He continually worketh in His Providence. It is in Him we live, and move, and have our being. It is by His immediate power that creation is sustained in existence, that every function of animal life is performed, and that every motion in the universe is effected.

The blindness and enmity of the mind of man wish to put Him at a distance, and to consider Him no farther the Governor of the world than as the Author of the general laws of nature according to which all events take place. But the Bible brings God before us in all things that occur. Of the innumerable insects that inhabit a blade of grass there is not one whose vital functions are not carried on by the power of God. To Him the lion roars for his prey, and He feedeth the ravens. He ever works without weariness. Epicurus removed his gods to a distance from the earth, that they might feast without disturbance from the tumults of men. He gave them a luxurious ease, far above the clouds, and did not interrupt their festivities with the government of the world. And an infidel philosophy in modern times does nearly the same, under the name of Christianity, by ascribing to God *only* what it calls a *general* providence. *This is not the God of the Bible.* The Christian may recognize his God as shining in the sun, breathing in the air, and living in all life. His immediate power is as necessary to sustain all things in existence, and to effect every change in their state, as it was to create them at first. His Providence is as necessary for the care of a microscopic insect, as for regulating the motions of a solar system.

Why then, Monarch of the east, did thy sleep forsake thee on that memorable night? When it fled, why didst thou not pursue it, and with thy instruments of music force it back to thy royal chamber? Call thy minstrels, and woo it with softest sounds of sweetest melody; lure it to thy couch with the voice of song. Come forth, ye harmonious choirs; raise your most enchanting airs, and lull your monarch in repose. Tell me, you wise men of the world, why nothing could amuse the king at this time, but the chronicles of his kingdom? Is this the usual requiem of an eastern monarch? Is a dry register of facts a likely expedient to hush the restless thoughts, and induce the gentler influences of sleep? Tell me, Ahasuerus, why that thought passed across thy mind at this time? Where shall I find its origin? Out of a million of millions of thoughts, this appears the least likely to strike thee at such a time. Thou art silent O monarch! of this thou knowest no more than the bed on which thou dost lie. It came, but whence it came thou knowest as little as thou dost of the birth-place of the wind. And why didst thou yield to it when it came? What made thy free will to indulge this thought? Was not the thought thine own? Was not

compliance with its suggestions thine own action?

Of this it is impossible for thee to doubt. How then can this thy thought be ascribed to God? In what mysterious sense can this action be the appointment of God? All is light, yet all is mystery. The facts are as certain and as obvious as the mind of man can wish; yet *to adjust their boundaries* is as impossible as to draw a line between the colours of the rainbow. The most obvious truths may be incomprehensible to man. This thought, and the action which was its result, are the king's; yet they are the instruments through which the Almighty Ruler of the world performs His purpose. Take these away, and you destroy the whole chain of Providence exhibited in the book of Esther. But even when the book of the chronicles comes, are there not a thousand chances that *the suitable part* may not turn up? What directed the reader *to the proper place*? In so extensive a subject as the annals of the Persian empire, what probability is there that the reader will happen on the few lines that record the service of Mordecai? He might have read till morning without touching this subject. What finger guided him to this story? Is it not more likely that the curiosity of the king would prompt him to hear some of the transactions of former reigns? This was the hour for the deliverance and exaltation of Mordecai, and it was the finger of God that pointed to the record of his service. Every step we advance in this wonderful history, we see a display of an overruling Providence. The book of Esther is a book of wonders without a miracle.

The king hears the record of the conspiracy, and enquires about the reward of his services. He takes it for granted that he must have received a suitable recompense in honour and dignity; but finds that he is yet unrewarded! Strange! very strange! inexplicably strange! But God's design is clear. The Divine plan required that Mordecai's exaltation should be delayed till now. But it shall be delayed no longer. God's providence requires that this very moment Mordecai shall be raised; for Haman is at the door to demand his life. Keep Mordecai's services another hour unknown to the king and the servant of God is given into the hand of the enemy. How injudiciously are royal favours often conferred! The man who deserved of the king more than any subject in his empire is neglected, while that worthless minion, Haman, rose almost to royal honours!

In the preservation of the life of the king, we may learn the duty of the servants of God to their chief rulers. Mordecai was in the land of the captivity of his people, yet, instead of forwarding a scheme for the murder of the sovereign, he saved him by a discovery of his danger. Christians ought to stand at the utmost distance from every scheme that tends to overturn or embarrass civil government. Their duty and safety in every country demands submission to the ruling powers.

There is something worthy of admiration in the courage of Mordecai during the time of his being neglected after his important service. We find no unbecoming intrusion on the notice of majesty, no cringing at the knees of Haman and the minions of court, to forward his claims to preferment. Yet, when honours came, they are received without any affectation of social indifference; he appears in the splendour of royalty, and becomes greater and greater in the Persian empire. Unlike an Aristides or a Diogenes, he spurns not the favour of the king, nor returns a rude reply to the kindness of majesty. A Christian ought never to show himself lower than an heir of heaven; but to affect a disregard to all worldly comfort is the affectation of philosophic pride.

While in Mordecai we find something to blame, we may find in him much more to praise. God accepted him as His servant, though he was ignorant of some points of duty.

In him we find the strongest faith in the Divine protection, and the most heroic devotedness to the cause of God and His people. Should not this be a lesson to us all? And while we faithfully bear our testimony against errors of every kind, let us be willing to acknowledge the servants of God in all the various denominations where they are to be found. We have all our own errors; and though this ought not to induce us to look on error as innocent, it ought to keep us from despising the weakest of the people of God. Is it not a most surprising thing, that any Christian can find a difficulty in recognizing those whom *God* has recognized and sealed with His Holy Spirit?

At the critical moment of the king's enquiries about Mordecai, Haman had come into the outward court, to solicit for his immediate execution. Mark the Lord of providence in every step. Had not the king been kept from sleep—had not the book of records been called for his amusements—had not the account of the conspiracy turned up to the reader—Mordecai would now have been given into the hand of his enemy.

Mark the providence of God, also, in having Haman at hand, that by his mouth the honours of Mordecai might be awarded, and that by *his* instrumentality they might be conferred. Why did the king think of referring the reward of Mordecai to another? Why did he not himself determine the dignities to be conferred on his preserver? Or, if he refers to another, why did he not immediately leave the matter to those now about him? Why does he ask, Who is in the court? Why was Haman there at this moment? Why was he the only one that waited so early on the king? Why did Ahasuerus put the question in such a manner as to conceal the object of the royal favour? Why does the king, instead of plainly naming Mordecai, use the periphrasis “the man whom the king delights to honour”? Why did this form of the question allow Haman to suppose that he was himself the happy man for whom the honours were intended? At this time the king knew nothing of the designs of Haman, and had no design to ensnare him. Every circumstance here is wonderfully providential. From this we see that *God can make the greatest enemies of His people the means of advancing their interests*. Whom then ought the Christian to fear, but God?

Behold the retributive justice of God in the death of Haman! One of the chamberlains, who probably had seen it when he went to call him to the feast, mentioned the gallows that Haman had prepared in his house to hang Mordecai. “The king said, Hang him thereon.”

But we are not yet done with the wonders of Providence in this affair. Even with all the good intentions of the king, how can the Jews be preserved? The first decree could not be revoked; how then could a handful of Jews, scattered over all the provinces of the empire, stand up against their enemies in all nations? Although they had the royal license to defend themselves and destroy their adversaries, how could one small nation, so widely dispersed, escape destruction when impunity invited the assault, and instigated malice? Their escape is secured by the awe inspired into the nations by the elevation of Mordecai. The God who so often filled the hearts of the most numerous armies with the dread of His people, few in number, now filled the nations of the Persian empire with the fear of them. “The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; *for the fear of them fell upon all people*. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the *fear of Mordecai fell upon them*. For Mordecai was great in the king's house,

and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them” (Esth. 9:2-5). Fear not the malice of your enemies, ye children of the Most High. Your God can deliver you out of their hands. Lift up your heads, Christians, for your redemption draweth nigh. Ye shall yet have “light, and gladness, and joy, and honour” (8:16).

But in the Book of Esther we are not only to attend to the wonderful interpositions of Providence manifested in the facts of history. From the manner of revelation, in innumerable other instances, we are warranted to consider this history as prophetic and typical. In the deliverance of the Jews on this occasion, we may see God’s method of *preserving His Church* in the time of the fourth beast; and *the final triumph of the saints* of the Most High. When the Reformation opened the gates of Babylon, many Christians have remained there, or in some of its provinces. They are thus exposed to loss and danger; but they shall not be destroyed. Their enemies plot their ruin, but the mischief will ultimately fall on their own heads. In Haman we see a striking type of the Man of Sin; he seeks to destroy the whole Israel of God; but his effort will only bring on his own ruin. All must honour this wicked Haman. He indeed seeks Divine honours, and there is a temptation here to stretch the type to the antitype, and find Haman guilty of claiming Divine worship. But this is not in evidence, and there is no necessity that there should in all things be a perfect correspondence between the type and the antitype. This likeness is seen sufficiently in the honours that his imagination suggested for the man whom the king delights to honour, when he supposed that he was himself the person.

It is astonishing that he presumed to award royal honours to any subject of the empire. Was not this likely to awaken the jealousy of a despot? Yet such was the arrogance of this Man of Sin, that Haman answered the king, “For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour” (6:7-9). Can there be a more correct figure of the blasphemous pretension of the Man of Sin, who has usurped the honours of God? These honours, however, were without scruple awarded to Mordecai by the king. “Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken” (v. 10). And if Mordecai is a type of the Son of God, how justly were these honours awarded! The Father delights to have Him honoured even as Himself.

In the unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians, we may see one of the features of the kingdom of the Man of Sin (Popery), whose infallible decrees cannot be altered. Yet notwithstanding the irreversible decree that determines the destruction of all heretics, the providence of God has made other provisions for their safety. The decree never dies, but it may slumber. Other laws may be made by the state to counteract it.

In the fall of Haman, let us anticipate the overthrow of all the opposers of the kingdom of Christ. All the schemes devised for overturning Christianity will not only prove abortive, but will finally bring down vengeance on the heads of their authors.

We may here see how God can bring down the Man of Sin by the ordinary course of

Providence, without employing a single miracle. He can make His very enemies the instruments of effecting His designs. By them He usually cuts off those whom He devotes to temporal destruction; and by them also He can deliver His own people. When Haman was cut off “many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them” (8:17). How well does this correspond with the increase of the true kingdom of Christ by genuine converts, when destruction shall have fallen on mystical Babylon! No king but the Messiah can reign in the midst of His enemies, and perform His will by those who design to oppose it.

The Doctrine of Justification

6. *Its Source.*

Let us here review, briefly, the ground which we have already covered. We have seen, first, that “to justify” means to pronounce righteous. It is not a Divine work, but a Divine verdict, the sentence of the Supreme Court, declaring that the one justified stands perfectly conformed to all the requirements of the law. Justification assures the believer that the Judge of all the earth is for him, and not against him: that justice itself is on his side. Second, we dwelt upon the great and seemingly insoluble problem which is thereby involved: how a God of truth can pronounce righteous one who is completely devoid of righteousness, how He can receive into His judicial favour one who is a guilty criminal, how He can exercise mercy without insulting justice, how He can be gracious and yet enforce the high demands of His Law. Third, we have shown that the solution to this problem is found in the perfect satisfaction which the incarnate Son rendered unto Divine Law, and that on the basis of that satisfaction God can truthfully and righteously pronounce just all who truly believe the Gospel.

In our last article we pointed out that the satisfaction which Christ made to the Divine Law consists of two distinct parts, answering to the twofold need of him who is to be justified. First, as a responsible *creature* I am under binding obligations to keep the law—to love God with all my heart and my neighbor as myself. Second, as a *criminal* I am under the condemnation and curse of that law which I have constantly transgressed in thought and word and deed. Therefore, if another was to act as my surety and make reparation for me, he must perfectly obey all the precepts of the law, and then endure the awful penalty of the law. That is exactly what was undertaken and accomplished by the Lord Jesus in His virtuous life and vicarious death. By Him every demand of the law was fulfilled; by Him every obligation of the believer was fully met.

It has been objected by some that the obedience of Christ *could not* be imputed to the account of others, for being “made under the law” (Gal. 4:4) as *man*, He *owed* submission to the law on His own account. This is a serious mistake, arising out of a failure to recognize the absolute uniqueness of the Man Christ Jesus. Unlike we, He was never placed under the Adamic Covenant, and therefore He owed nothing to the law. Moreover, the manhood of Christ never had a separate existence: in the virgin’s womb the eternal Son took the seed of Mary into union with His Deity, so that whereas the first man was of the earth, earthy, “the second Man is *the Lord from Heaven*” (1 Cor. 15:47), and as such He was infinitely superior to the law, owing nothing to it, being personally possessed of all the excellencies of Deity. Even while He walked this earth “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

It was entirely for His peoples’ sake that the God-man Mediator was “made under the law.” It was in order to work out for them a perfect righteousness, which should be placed to their account, that He took upon Himself the form of a servant and became “obedient unto death.” What has been said above supplies the answer to another foolish objection which has been made against this blessed truth, namely, that if the obedience of the Man Christ Jesus were transferable it would be available *only for one other man*, seeing that every human being is required to obey the law, and that if *vicarious* obedience be acceptable to God then there would have to be as many *separate sureties* as there are believers who are saved. That would be true if the “surety”

were *merely* human, but inasmuch as the Surety provided by God is the God-man Media-

tor, *His* righteousness is of infinite value, for the law was *more* “honoured and magnified” by the obedience of “the Lord from Heaven” than had every member of the human race perfectly kept it. The righteousness of the God-man Mediator is of *infinite* value, and therefore available for as many as God is pleased to impute it unto.

The value or merit of an action increases in proportion to the dignity of the person who performs it, and He who obeyed in the room and stead of the believer was not only a holy man, but the Son of the living God. Moreover, let it be steadily borne in mind that the obedience which Christ rendered to the law was entirely *voluntary*. Prior to His incarnation, He was under *no* obligation to the law, for He had Himself (being God) formulated that law. His being made of a woman and made under the law was entirely a *free act* on His own part. We come into being and are placed under the law without our consent; but the Lord from Heaven existed before His incarnation, and assumed our nature by His spontaneous act: “Lo, I come. . . . I delight to do Thy will” (Psa. 40:7, 8). No other person could use such language, for it clearly denotes a *liberty* to act or not to act, which no mere creature possesses. Placing Himself under the law and rendering obedience to it was founded solely on His own voluntary deed. His obedience was therefore a “free will offering,” and therefore as He did not owe obedience to the law by any prior obligation, not being at all necessary for Himself, it is available for imputation to others, that they should be *rewarded for* it.

If, then, the reader has been able to follow us closely in the above observations, it should be clear to him that when Scripture speaks of God “justifying the ungodly” the meaning is that the believing sinner is brought into an entirely *new relation to the law*; that in consequence of Christ’s righteousness being made over to him, he is now absolved from all liability to punishment, and is given a title to all the reward merited by Christ’s obedience. Blessed, blessed truth for comforting the *conscientious* Christian who daily groans under a sense of his sad failures and who mourns because of his lack of practical conformity to the image of Christ. Satan is ever ready to harass such an one and tell him his profession is vain. But it is the believer’s privilege to overcome him by “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11)—to remind himself anew that Another has atoned for all his sins, and that despite his innumerable shortcomings he still stands “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). If I am truly resting on the finished work of Christ for me, the Devil cannot successfully lay anything to my charge before God, though if I am walking carelessly He will suffer him to charge my conscience with unrepented and unconfessed sins.

In our last article, under the *nature* of justification, we saw that the constituent elements of this Divine blessing are two in number, the one being negative in its character, the other positive. The negative blessing is the cancellation of guilt, or the remission of sins—the entire record of the believer’s transgressions of the law, filed upon the Divine docket, having been blotted out by the precious blood of Christ. The positive blessing is the bestowal upon the believer of an inalienable title to the *reward* which the obedience of Christ merited for him—that reward is life, the judicial favour of God, Heaven itself. The unchanging sentence of the law is “the man which doeth those things shall *live* by them” (Rom. 10:5). As we read in Romans 7:10, “the commandment, which was ordained to *life*.” It is just as true that obedience to the law secured life, as disobedience insured death. When the young ruler asked Christ “what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” He answered, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:16, 17).

It was because His people had failed to “keep the commandments” that the God-man Mediator was “made under the law,” and obeyed it for them. And therefore its *reward* of “life” is due unto those whose Surety He was; yea, due unto Christ Himself to bestow upon them. Therefore did the Surety, when declaring “I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4), remind the Father, “that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him” (v. 2). But more, on the footing of *justice*, Christ demands that His people be taken to Heaven, saying, “Father, I *will* that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am” (John 17:24)—He *claims* eternal life *for His people* on the ground of His finished work, as the *reward* of His obedience.

“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto *justification of life*” (Rom. 5:18). The offence of the first Adam brought down the curse of the broken law upon the whole human race; but the satisfaction of the last Adam secured the blessing of the fulfilled law upon all those whom He represented. Judgment unto condemnation is a law term intending eternal death, the wages of sin; the “free gift” affirms that a gratuitous justification is bestowed upon all its recipients—“*justification of life*” being the issue of the gift, parallel with “shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (v. 17). The sentence of justification adjudges and entitles its object unto eternal life.

Having now considered the two great blessings which come to the believer at his justification—deliverance from the curse of the law (death) and a title to the blessing of the law (life)—let us now seek to take a view of the originating *source* from which they proceed. This is the free, pure sovereign *grace* of God: as it is written “Being *justified* freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24). What is grace? It is God’s unmerited and uninfluenced favour, shown unto the undeserving and hell-deserving: neither human worthiness, works or willingness, attracting it, nor the lack of them repelling or obstructing it. What could there be in me to win the favourable regard of Him who is of too pure eyes to behold evil, and move Him to justify me? Nothing whatever; nay, there was everything in me calculated to make Him abhor and destroy me—my very self-righteous efforts to earn a place in Heaven deserving only a lower place in Hell. If, then, I am ever to be “justified” *by God* it must be by pure grace, and that alone.

Grace is the very essence of the Gospel—the only hope for fallen men, the sole comfort of saints passing through much tribulation on their way to the kingdom of God. The Gospel is the announcement that God is prepared to deal with guilty rebels on the ground of free favour, of pure benignity; that God will blot out sin, cover the believing sinner with a robe of spotless righteousness, and receive him as an accepted son: not on account of anything he has done or ever will do, but of sovereign mercy, acting independently of the sinner’s own character and deservings of eternal punishment. Justification is perfectly gratuitous so far as we are concerned, *nothing* being required of us in order to it, either in the way of price and satisfaction or preparation and meetness. We have not the slightest degree of merit to offer as the ground of our acceptance, and therefore if God ever does accept us it must be out of unmingled grace.

It is as “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) that Jehovah justifies the ungodly. It is as “the God of all grace” He seeks, find, and saves His people: asking them for nothing, giving them everything. Strikingly is this brought out in that word “being justified *freely* by His grace” (Rom. 3:24), the design of that adverb being to exclude all consideration of

anything in us or from us which should be the cause or condition of our justification. That same Greek adverb is translated “without a cause” in John 15:25—“they hated Me without a cause.” The world’s hatred of Christ was “*without a cause*” so far as *He* was concerned: there was nothing whatever in Him which, to the slightest degree, deserved their enmity against Him: there was nothing in Him unjust, perverse, or evil; instead, there was everything in Him which was pure, holy, lovely. In like manner, there is nothing whatever in us to call forth the approbation of God: by nature there is “*no good thing*” in us; but instead, everything that is evil, vile, loathsome.

“Being *justified without a cause* by His GRACE.” How this tells out the very *heart* of God! While there was no motive to move Him, outside of Himself, there was one inside Himself; while there was nothing in us to impel God to justify us, His own grace moved Him, so that He devised a way whereby His wondrous love could have vent and flow forth to the chief of sinners, the vilest of rebels. As it is written, “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake*, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:25). Wondrous, matchless grace! We cannot for a moment look outside the grace of God for any motive or reason why He should ever have noticed us, still less had respect unto such ungodly wretches.

The first moving cause, then, that inclined God to show mercy to His people in their undone and lost condition, was His own wondrous grace—unsought, uninfluenced, unmerited by us. He might justly have left us all obnoxious to the curse of His Law, without providing any Surety for us, as He did the fallen angels; but such was His grace toward us that “He spared not His own Son.” “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified *by His grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7). It was His own sovereign favour and good will which actuated God to form this wondrous scheme and method of justification.

Against what has been said above, it has been objected by Socinians and their echoists that this cannot be: if the believing sinner is justified upon the grounds of a full satisfaction having been made to God for him by a surety, then his discharge from condemnation and his reception into God’s judicial favour must be an act of pure *justice*, and therefore could not be by grace. Or, if it be purely an act of Divine *grace*, then no surety can have obeyed the law in the believer’s stead. But this is to confound two distinct things: the relation of God to Christ the Surety, and the relation of God to me the sinner. It was *grace* which transferred my sins to Christ; it was *justice* which smote Christ on account of those sins. It was *grace* which appointed me unto everlasting bliss; it is *justice to Christ* which requires I shall enjoy that which He purchased for me.

Toward the sinner justification is an act of free unmerited favour; but toward Christ, as a sinner’s Surety, it is an act of justice that eternal life should be bestowed upon those for whom His meritorious satisfaction was made. First, it was pure grace that God was *willing to accept* satisfaction from the hands of a surety. He might have exacted the debt from us in our own persons, and then our condition had been equally miserable as that of the fallen angels, for whom no mediator was provided. Second, it was wondrous grace that God Himself *provided* a Surety for us, which we could not have done. The only creatures who are capable of performing perfect obedience are the holy angels, yet none of them could have assumed and met *our* obligations, for they are not akin to us, possessing

not human nature, and therefore incapable of dying. Even had an angel become incarnate, his obedience to the law could not have availed for the whole of God's elect, for it would not have possessed *infinite* value.

None but a Divine person taking human nature into union with Himself could present unto God a satisfaction adequate for the redemption of His people. And it was impossible for men to have found out that Mediator and Surety: it must have its first rise in God, and not from us: it was He that "found" a ransom (Job 33:24) and laid help upon One that is "mighty" (Psa. 89:19). In the last place, it was amazing *grace* that the Son was willing to perform such a work for us, without whose consent the justice of God could not have exacted the debt from Him. And His grace is the most eminent in that He knew beforehand all the unspeakable humiliation and unparalleled suffering which He would encounter in the discharge of this work, yet that did not deter Him; nor was He unapprized of the character of those for whom He did it—the guilty, the ungodly, the hell-deserving; yet He shrank not back.—A.W.P.

"O to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee."

A Word of Warning

“Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24): the word “hear” obviously includes what is *read*, for that which is written or printed is addressed to the ears of our intellect. Few people today realize the urgent need for “taking heed” unto *what* they read. Just as the natural food which is eaten either helps or hinders the body, so the mental food we receive either benefits or injures the mind, and that, in turn, affects the heart. Now just as it is harmful to *listen* to the rubbish and poison which is being served from the great majority of present-day pulpits, so it is exceedingly injurious to the soul to read most of what is now being published. “Take *heed* what ye hear” and read. But let us seek to be more specific.

The only thing which is really worth calling “religion” is *the life of God in the soul*—commenced, carried on, and consummated solely by the Holy Spirit. Hence, whatever does not bear the impress of the Spirit’s unction should be rejected by the saint: for not only can unctionless messages do us no good, but what proceeds not from the Spirit is of the flesh. Here, then, is the test which God’s children ought to apply unto all they hear, and here is the balance in which they should weigh all that they read. True, there are varying degrees of the Spirit’s unction: as it is in the natural so it is in the spiritual—there will be a varying amount of deposition from the faintest moisture of dew to the copious shower. As there had to be “salt” in every sacrifice (Lev. 2:13), so every discourse or article proceeding from the Spirit’s aid is “seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6). But O how very much today is *devoid of spiritual* savour and flavour!

Some of God’s dear people may suppose that it would be presumptuous to set themselves up as *judges* of what they hear or read, but that is a serious mistake, being both a false humility and a shirking of duty. The Apostle rebuked the Hebrews because their senses (spiritual faculties) *were not developed* so as to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:13). With as much reason might it be termed pride for any one to pass judgment upon the groceries or meats purchased from the stores. Others may ask, “But how are simple and unlearned souls to distinguish between the different religious publications of the day?” Very simply: in sampling your natural food how do you determine whether or not it be *seasoned*? By your natural taste, of course. So it is spiritually: the “new man” *has a palate too!* If the God of creation has given us natural palates for the purpose of distinguishing between wholesome and unwholesome food, the God of grace has furnished His people with a capacity, a spiritual sense, to distinguish between nutritious and innutritious soul food.

“For the ear *trieth* words, as the mouth tasteth meat” (Job 34:3). Does *yours*, my reader? Are you as careful about what you take into your mind as what you take into your stomach? You certainly ought to be, for the former is even more important than the latter. If you eat some material food which is injurious, you can take a purgative and get rid of the same; but if you have devoured mental food which is injurious, it *stays with you!* “For the ear *trieth* words, as the mouth tasteth food.” Again, we ask, Does *yours*, dear reader? Are you learning to distinguish between “letter” and “spirit,” between the “form” and the “power,” between that which is of the earth and that which is from Heaven, between that which is lifeless and unctionless and that which is instinct with the breath of God? If the answer be No, then you are greatly the loser.

How many of God’s dear children listen to the automaton “letter” preachers of today, and yet find nothing suited to the needs of their poor souls! And how many are subscrib-

ing for one magazine after another, hoping to find that which will the better furnish them to fight the good fight of faith, only to be disappointed? What they hear and what they read does not penetrate and grip: it has *no power*: it neither breaks down nor lifts up: it produces neither godly sorrow nor godly joy. The messages they hear or read fall upon their ear like an idle or twice-told tale: it completely fails *to reach their case* or minister to their needs. They are no better off after hearing a hundred such “sermons” or reading through a hundred such periodicals than they were at the beginning: they are no farther from the world and no nearer unto God.

It is often a long time before God’s children are able to account for this. They *blame themselves*: they are exceedingly loath to say, “This message *is not of God*.” They are afraid to act in the spiritual as they do in the natural, and condemn and discard that which is worthless. While they feel a *lack of power* in the sermons they hear or the articles they read, and while their souls steadily get dried up like a potsherd, they are slow to realize that this is *the inevitable effect* of the unctious preaching they listen to or the unctious matter they read, and that such dryness and leanness of soul is *inevitable* by their association with unhumbled and empty professors. But in due time God opens their eyes, and they see through the flimsy veil and discover that both the sermons they hear and the literature they read are only the product of a *dead* profession.

Ah, it is a great thing when once the Holy Spirit teaches a soul that it is *power* which is lacking from the lifeless preaching and lifeless articles of dead professors. It is *power* which the renewed soul seeks: a message which has power to search his conscience, to pierce him to the quick, to write it upon his *heart*; a message which has power to bring him to his knees in broken-hearted confession to God; a message which has power to make him *feel* that *he is* “vile”; a message which has power to drive him to *Christ*, for the binding up of his wounds, for Him to pour in “oil and wine,” and send him on his way rejoicing. Yes, what the *renewed* soul longs for (though at first he knows it not) is that Divine message which comes to him “not in word only, but also *in power*” (1 Thess. 1:5).

Sooner or later, every member of the Body of Christ comes to value “power,” and to *count as worthless whatever lacks it*. It is by Divine power he is taught in his own soul, by which he is made to feel acutely his sinnership, his carnality, his beggarliness. It is Divine power working in his heart—the *same* power which brought Christ again from the dead (Eph. 1:19, 20)—which draws his affections unto things above and makes his soul pant after God “as the hart panteth after the water brooks” (Psa. 42:1). It is this Divine power working in him which reveals to his burdened spirit the Throne of Grace, and causes him to implore mercy and to seek grace “to help in time of need.” It is this Divine power working in him which makes him cry “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness” (Psa. 119:35, 36).

They who are partakers of this Divine power (and they are *few* in number) can never be satisfied with a powerless ministry, either oral or written. “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5), and are charmed with oratorical eloquence, catchy sayings, witty allusions, and jocular interspersions: on just such “husks” do the religious “swine” feed; but the penitent prodigal can find no nutriment therein! Men “of the world”—and they may be graduates from some “Bible Institute” or possessors of a diploma from some seminary, now styling themselves “preachers of the Gospel”—will speak of the things of the world (varnishing it over by denominating them “signs of the

times”) and “the world heareth them” (1 John 4:5). But those who are seeking to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling” obtain no help therefrom, yea, they perceive clearly that such sermons and periodicals are “broken cisterns, that can hold *no water*” (Jer. 2:13).

“*Take heed what ye hear and read!* More than forty years ago the saintly Adolph Saphir wrote, “I think the fewer books we read the better: it is like times of cholera, when we should only drink filtered water.” What would he say if he were on earth today and glanced over the deadly poison sent forth by the heterodox and the lifeless rubbish put out by the orthodox? Christian reader, if you value the health of your soul, cease hearing and quit reading all that is lifeless, ununctionless, powerless, no matter what prominent or popular name be attached thereto. Life is too short to waste valuable time on that which profits not. Ninety-nine out of every hundred of the religious books, booklets, and magazines now being published are not worth the paper on which they are printed.

To turn away from the lifeless preachers and publishers of the day may involve a real cross. Your motives will be misconstrued, your words perverted, and your actions misinterpreted. The sharp arrows of false report will be directed against you: you will be called proud and self-righteous because you refuse to fellowship empty professors. You will be termed censorious and bitter if you condemn in plain speech the subtle delusions of Satan. You will be dubbed narrowminded and uncharitable because you refuse to join in singing the praises of the “great” and “popular” men of the day. More and more you will be made to painfully realize that the path which leadeth unto Life *is* “narrow” and that FEW there be that find it. The Lord be pleased to grant unto each of us the hearing ear and obedient heart: “*Take heed what ye hear and read!*”—A.W.P.

Poor Yet Rich

One of the prayers which the Lord teaches His people to pray is, “Bow down Thine ear, O LORD, hear me: *for* I am poor and needy” (Psa. 86:1). Empty professors filled with pride, by their very attitude and actions, boast that they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). But the real child of God, whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit to see his utter worthlessness, freely acknowledges that he *is* (in himself) “poor and needy”; and the Lord Jesus declares “*Blessed are the poor in spirit*” (Matt. 5:3). May more of *this* poverty be our felt portion.

Above we have said that the child of God is *in himself* “poor and needy”: that is a most necessary qualification, for *in Christ* he is rich and possesses all things (1 Cor. 3:21). In Christ there is an infinite “fulness,” and it is the office and work of faith to draw upon and draw from the same. It is the Christian’s unspeakable privilege to recognize that he *is now* (not simply will be in Heaven) a “joint-heir” with Christ. It is his glorious privilege to perceive that Christ is the *Head* of His people, and as a wife turns to her husband for money to meet the household expenses, so His Spouse should *act* toward her Husband—coming to Him for counsel, help, supplies of need, *in full confidence* that His love will freely bestow them.

Thus we have sought, again, to preserve the *balance* of Truth. Not until we are made to feel anew our emptiness, nothingness, sinfulness, woe-begone condition, shall we continue to turn unto Him whose exhaustless riches are ever available when the empty hand of *faith* is extended toward Him. Alas, so many of His dear people have been left with the impression (if not expressly taught so) that there is nothing better for them, while here in this wilderness, than to feel their helplessness and groan over their wretchedness, remaining spiritual paupers to the end of their journey. No doubt *that* is greatly to be preferred to the self-sufficiency and self-righteousness of the bloated and Satan-deceived “free-willers.” Yes, indeed; a million times better for any of us to lie wounded, stripped, groaning, and *half*-dead by the wayside, than be left by God *wholly* dead in a state of carnal complacency. And yet, beloved, it is far from glorifying to the Lord, as it is far from our entering into the Inheritance which is now ours, to be the helpless “victim of circumstances,” the captive of the flesh, or the doormat of Satan.

Daily living by faith on Christ is what makes the difference between the sickly and the healthy Christian, between the defeated and the victorious saint. Not that we are suggesting it is possible for any of us to attain a state or experience where we are no longer tripped up by Satan, or wounded by the flesh. No; but rather that the Christian should refuse to *continue* in that wounded state *and go on* lying on the ground moaning and groaning. Our duty is to *search out* what it was in us which gave Satan the occasion *to* trip us up and the flesh to wound us; confess it to God, put it under the Blood, and seek grace to enable us to be more watchful against a repetition of the same. We should eye the all-sufficient Atonement, count upon its efficacy to *cleanse from* the guilt and defilement of the fall we experienced; and having put the matter right with God refuse to allow it now to hinder our communion with Him—our free approaches unto and our delighting ourselves in His promises.

Does the reader say, in answer to what has just been said, “That is easier said than done.” Of course, for all “doing” requires *effort!* After the confession of a failure and fall, a feeling of shame and heaviness frequently oppresses the soul and makes it exceedingly difficult to approach the Holy One with filial freedom. What then is to be done? This:

begin by *thanking* God for the marvelous grace which has made such full provision for our wretched failures: *praise* Him for laying *all* your sins upon Christ. Then what? Why, *continue praising* Him that the blood of Christ is of such amazing potency, of such infinite efficacy, that it “cleanseth us from all sin.” Bless the God of all grace that He invites needy souls to come to His throne for *mercy*. That, my Christian reader, is the way to overcome heaviness of soul when filled with shame (after confession), and the way to overcome Satan’s efforts to keep you depressed: *thanksgivings and praises* for the provisions of mercy for *failing* saints will give “freedom of access” and restore unto the joy of communion quicker than anything.

It is written “the *joy* of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). There can be no spiritual energy for the cheerful performance of duty, no buoyant heart for the trials of life, unless the joy of the Lord fills the soul. It was by the “joy that was set before Him” that Christ “endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2). True, He was “the Man of Sorrows,” and “acquainted with grief” to an extent which none of us ever are; yet those sorrows did not incapacitate Him for attending to His Father’s business: that deep “grief” hindered Him not from daily going about “doing good.” No, there was a “joy” which sustained, which nerved, which energised Him for the doing of God’s will. And beloved fellow-pilgrim—groaning it may be over vile corruptions felt within, or disheartened and dismayed by the multiplying difficulties and obstacles without—that blessed One is still saying “If any man thirst, (for joy, or any spiritual grace) let him come *unto Me*, and DRINK” (John 7:37)—draw from My fulness.

It is striking to observe *the setting* of these words “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). They were spoken to the godly remnant in a “day of small things.” That remnant had listened to the reading and expounding of the law (Neh. 8:7, 8). As they listened, they were rebuked, reprovved, condemned; and, in consequence “*all* the people *wept* when they heard the words of the law.” That was startling, unusual, blessed: to behold a contrite and broken-hearted people is both a rare and precious sight. But were they to *continue* thus? lying in the dust sobbing and groaning? No, to *them* the words came “Neither be ye sorrowful”—dry up your tears, “for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” There is “a time to weep” and there is also “a time to laugh”; “a time to mourn, *and* a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4)! After grief for sin there should be joy for forgiveness.—
A.W.P.
