

Vol. XXIII

August, 1944

No. 8

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

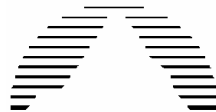
CONTENTS

The Path of Duty - Part D	3
The Prayers of the Apostles	5
<i>8. Romans 16: 25-27</i>	
The Mission and Miracles of Elisha	10
<i>20. Twelfth Miracle</i>	
Spiritual Growth or Christian Progress	14
<i>4d. Its Nature</i>	
The Doctrine of Reconciliation.....	18
<i>4b. Its Author</i>	

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

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

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THE PATH OF DUTY

Part D

In our last we sought to show that in order to tread the path of duty or “way of holiness” there must be, first, a desire for it: one must be a “wayfaring man”—that is, a man with a heart for that way, a love of holiness. Second, there must be a sense of our insufficiency: one must be a “fool” in his own estimation—that is, a person possessed of an humble spirit, conscious of his own stupidity. Third, there must be a turning to God’s Word for light on our path, for instruction therein, for that Word is the sole Rule of conduct, our Guidebook from earth to heaven. Obviously, the measure in which the first two things mentioned operate and are really dominant in me will determine the success I shall have in obtaining from the Scriptures the directions I so sorely need, and without which I am certain to “err” in the path of duty. If my desire for light from God wanes, or if I cherish confidence in my own wisdom or “common sense” then, though I may still read the Bible in a formal manner, yet I shall no longer “search the Scriptures daily” (Act 17:11) in a spirit of earnest and prayerful inquiry.

“My son, if thou wilt receive My words, and hide My commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom [which you profess to feel the need of], *and* apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge [of God’s will], *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding [of thy duty]: If thou seekest her as silver and searchest [the Scriptures] for her as *for* hid treasures [sparing no pains]; *Then* shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord [which is ‘the beginning of knowledge’: Pro 1:7] and find the knowledge of God” (Pro 2:1-5). It is not to the careless and halfhearted that the promise is made. It is not to the one who is content to please the Lord in merely a general way that “the secret of the Lord” is revealed. It is not to the prayerless that wisdom and spiritual discernment are vouchsafed. He who is largely indifferent to the holy claims of God upon him in times of prosperity, must not expect Him to show the way out of difficulty when a day of adversity overtakes him. It is those who are out and out for God and who walk by the precepts of His Word who have light on their path.

Let us call attention to one other spiritual grace, which is essential if we are to recognise the path of duty and then walk therein: “The *meek* will He guide in Judgment: and the *meek* will He teach His way” (Psa 25:9). Meekness is not to be confounded with humility, for they are quite distinct qualities. This is clear from the words of the Saviour who said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart:” (Mat 11:29)—the Greek word here rendered “lowly” is translated “humble” in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5. There should be no difficulty in discovering the force of this word. To go no further than the verse quoted (Psa 25:9): the fact that “meekness” is required in order to our being “guided” and “taught” suggests that it signifies a pliant and receptive heart. As humility is the opposite of pride and self-sufficiency, so meekness is the opposite of self-will and stubbornness. It is not the natural virtue which we are here treating of, for *that* very often approximates closely to weakness, but the spiritual grace of meekness, which is bold as a lion before an enemy, is submissive and obedient before God.

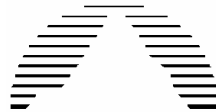
This lovely grace, like all others, appears in its full perfection in the Lord Jesus. Seen in His readiness to be the Covenant-head of His people, in His willingness to assume our nature, in His being subject to His parents during the days of His childhood, in His submitting to the ordinance of baptism, in His entire subjection to the Father’s will, in the whole course of His obedience. Seen when He was “led [not ‘dragged’ ‘or driven,’ but ‘led’ unresistingly] as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa 53:7). Thus, it should be evident that there is a real difference between true humility and meekness. Not only are they distinct, but they are not always operative in the same person. One may be humble and yet far from being meek. One may have a real sense of his own ignorance and stupidity, pray to God for light and wisdom, search His Word for the needed direction, and then when those directions are received *disregard* them because unacceptable. Unless our wills be truly yielded to God’s, when His will crosses ours, then we shall decline to heed the same.

It appears to the writer that what has just been pointed out serves to expose the sophistry of those who imagine that it is a more difficult matter to ascertain their duty, than to perform the same once it is perceived. Both experience and observation reveal the contrary. God’s Word is not ambiguous, but written in simple language for simple souls. True, it treats of the profoundest mysteries, which transcend the grasp of every finite intelligence; nevertheless, where it describes the way of holiness and defines what God requires from us, it uses terms so plain that misunderstanding is excuseless. Nor is it because our Guidebook is inadequate: it furnishes full directions and presents a sufficient solution to every practical problem, which may occasion us difficulty. It is the *obedience* which is difficult to flesh and blood, because our Rule so

often demands that which is contrary to our natural inclinations. It is because so many fear that to follow the right course would involve them in unpleasant consequences, that they so often turn from it. That is why the Saviour said, "If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them" (Joh 13:17). We all know various things, which should be done, but are slow to perform, because the flesh in us finds them distasteful.

"The way of the righteous *is made plain*" (Pro 15:19). The "righteous" man is he whose heart is right with God and whose conduct is regulated by the "Word of Righteousness." And since his heart be right toward God, he heeds those rules given him for the ordering of his steps: see Proverbs 4:23, 27. Do not expect God to reveal to you the whole path of duty in a moment: rather does He make known one step at a time. As the first step is taken in obedience to His will, He indicates the next one, and the more we yield ourselves to His governance, the clearer light shall we have both within and without. "A good understanding have all they that *do His commandments*" (Psa 111:10) because obedience to God delivers from the deceptions of the flesh and the delusions of Satan. That "good understanding" enables us to apply the general rules of Scripture to the varied details of our complex lives. That "good understanding" preserves us from making foolish mistakes. Because that "good understanding" is formed by obedience to the Divine commandments, it keeps us from acting according to selfish, worldly and carnal motives. And thus, it is that He "*leads [us]* in the way of righteousness" (Pro 8:20).

One question and we must conclude. Suppose I *failed* at a certain point to render obedience unto the clearly-revealed will of God, and instead in pursuing the path of duty, turned aside into the way of self-pleasing, and now I am eating the fruit of my own folly. Suppose I find that my way has become "hedge[d] up...with thorns" (Hos 2:6), so that I know not how to extricate myself. What am I to do? What steps must the backslider take in order to recovery? Why, humbly *confess* the sin to God and go back to the very point where you forsook the path of obedience. Abraham was called to sojourn in the land of Canaan, but when a famine arose, he forsook it and "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen 12:10)—where he got into serious trouble. But later, he went "unto the place where his tent had been at the *beginning*. . . Unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first" (Gen 13:3, 4). Do thou likewise: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the *first* works" (Rev 2:5). —AWP



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THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

8. *Romans 16: 25-27*

The parallels between Romans 16:5-27 and 1 Corinthians 2 are more or less obvious. In the one the apostle adores "Him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." In the other, he averred that he had "determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1Co 2:2) and affirmed his preaching had been "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1Co 2:4). In the former, he declares that his preaching had been "according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom 16:25). And in the latter, he affirms, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1Co 2:7). There, he announces the mystery "now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets" (Rom 16:26). Here, he quotes one of the Prophets and adds, "But God hath revealed *them* [the inconceivable things of the previous verse] unto us by His Spirit" (1Co 2:10). In the doxology, he ascribes glory unto "God only wise;" in the doctrinal passage, he expressly mentions "the wisdom of God" (1Co 2:7). Thus, one passage serves to interpret the other.

"And now is made manifest." What is? Why, the grand "mystery" mentioned in the previous verse. And how is it "made manifest"? Why by his "gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." With this declaration of the apostle's should be closely compared his earlier one: "But now the righteousness of God without the Law is *manifested*" (Rom 3:21); and that in turn takes us back to the thesis of this epistle: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God *revealed* from faith to faith" (Rom 1:16, 17). In the N.T. era (the "now" of our text and of Rom 3:21), there has been a fuller and more glorious manifestation of God than there was in all the preceding eras. And that in a twofold sense: both in the degree of light given and those who received it. God was wondrously made known to Israel, yet nothing like He was when He became incarnate and tabernacled among men. God's perfections were exhibited in His Law, yet how much clearer are they irradiated by His Gospel!

Perhaps nothing more strikingly portrays the contrast between the two dispensations in connection with the manifestation of the Divine excellency than placing side by side what is recorded in Exodus 32 and a statement made in 2 Corinthians 4. In the former, we find Moses making request of Jehovah: "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory" (Exo 33:18). Let the reader look up verses 19 to 22 and then ponder the Lord's response: "thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen" (Exo 33:23)—how well may a person be known by a passing glance of his "back parts"! That was characteristic and emblematic of the O.T.¹ economy. Now set over against that this most precious passage: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in *the face* of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6)! "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared *Him*" (John 1:18)—revealed Him, made Him known, fully told Him forth.

But there is another sense in which the "mystery" is "now made manifest," as it was not previously, namely, in the more extensive promulgation of it. Under the former economy, the Psalmist declared, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and *as for his* judgments, *they* have not known them. Praise ye the LORD." (Psa 147:19, 20). For more than half the present span of human history, the heathen world was left in darkness—for from the tower of Babel (Gen 11) onwards, God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Act 14:16), so that they were deprived of even the outward means of grace. But after His resurrection, the Saviour bade His ambassadors, "Go ye therefore and teach *all* nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Mat 28:19), in accord with which He gave a special commission unto Saul of Tarsus to bear His name "before the Gentiles" (Act 9:15), and by and through the Gospel—which he proclaimed the contents of the grand mystery—were heralded abroad far and wide.

That to which reference has been made receives express mention in all of the leading passages where this Mystery is in view. In our present one, it is specifically declared that it is "made known to all nations" (Rom 16:26). In 1 Corinthians 2:8, we learn that in the past, it was that which "none of the princes of this world knew," but which God had revealed unto the Corinthian saints (1Co 2:10). In Ephesians 3:8, the

¹ O.T. – Old Testament.

apostle averred it had been given him to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” which in the light of verses 2 to 5, signifies that therein was contained the very substance of the mystery. In Colossians 1:25-27, he alludes again to the special dispensation God had given him unto *the Gentiles* in connection with the mystery, which he there speaks of as “Christ in you [or ‘among you’], the hope of glory.” While in what may perhaps be termed the classic passage of 1 Timothy 3:16, one of the items comprising the mystery is that it should be “preached unto the Gentiles.”

The prominent place accorded “the Gentiles” in these passages has led some of the more extreme dispensationalists to draw an erroneous conclusion, arguing that the mystical Body of Christ is pre-eminently Gentilish, that the O.T. saints have no place in it, and that it not only had no begun-historical existence before the call of the apostle Paul, but that no other reference to it is to be found outside of his epistles. We shall not turn aside to refute this error, but would simply call attention to the fact that O.T. Prophecy clearly foretold that Christ should be “a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6,7; 49:6), while the Saviour Himself announced “other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. . . and there shall be one fold, *and* one Shepherd” (Joh 10:16), and Caiaphas prophesied that He should “gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (Joh 11:52). It is not the simple purpose to call Gentiles into the Church, nor to make them “joint-heirs” with the Jews, but rather the whole plan of redemption, which made that possible, that the “mystery” is concerned with.

“...And by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:” (Rom 16:26). We will consider the subordinate clause first. This “commandment” respects the three things mentioned in the previous verse: it was by Divine appointment that this Gospel, this preaching of Jesus Christ, this revealed mystery, should be made known. The word rendered, “commandment” may mean “decree,” and then the reference is to Psalm 2:7 and those passages where the decree is declared, such as, “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” (Psa 98:3); it may mean law or “statute,” in which case the reference is to the words of our Lord, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations”—that was indeed the commandment of the everlasting God, both as the Father spake in Him and as He “is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5). The reason for and the special propriety of, here styling Deity “the *everlasting* God,” lies in the dominant subject of this passage—namely, “the mystery” or “the everlasting covenant,” in which was centralised His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), which respected the salvation of His elect (2Ti 1:9), concerning which God “promised [to Christ] before the world began” (Tit 1:2).

We regard the clause “and by the Scriptures of the prophets” (Rom 16:26) as looking back first to the “mystery” of the previous verse; second, as being linked to this, the “but now is made manifest;” and third, as connected with the final clause of this verse. The mystery or *everlasting covenant* was the subject of O.T. revelation (2Sa 23:5; Psa 89:34; Isa 55:3), yet for the most part its wondrous contents were couched in obscure figures and mysterious prophecies. It is by means of the antitypes of those figures, and the fulfilment of those prophecies, that such light has been cast upon what was so heavily veiled throughout the old economy, that the parable they contained has been explained and their symbols interpreted, so, that what was for many generations dark is “now made manifest.” Israel’s prophets announced the grace that should come unto us and “searched diligently” (1Pe 1:10) in connection therewith, yet Peter himself needed a special vision (Act 10) to convince him that salvation was designed for the Gentiles. Thus, the O.T. credits the New, and the N.T. illuminates the Old: what was latent in the one is now patent in the other.

“Made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.” This is the immediate design of the Gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the mystery, the commandment of the everlasting God: it is that all who read and hear the same should both believe and obey it, receive and be governed by it. Though saving faith and evangelical obedience may be distinguished, yet they are inseparable, the one never existing without the other. As we said in the foregoing article, the Gospel commands us to give up ourselves to Christ, to be accepted through Him, and to be ruled by Him, for He is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). Unspeakably solemn is it to know that He will yet come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel” (2Th 1:8). Only that faith is of any value, which produces sincere and loving obedience, and only that obedience is acceptable to God, which issues from faith in His incarnate Son. The design of the Gospel is to bring us to both. Faith is the vital principle, obedience its necessary product; faith is the root, obedience is the fruit.

“To God *only wise be glory*” (Rom 16:27). The reason why the apostle here adores the Deity thus leads unto a wide and wondrous subject, which we trust will grip the reader, as much as it has the writer. Though

we propose to devote the balance of this article to a consideration of the same, we shall not now attempt a complete outline of it, for in the perfect timing of His providence (it is quite without design on our part), this glorious attribute of God's and the exercise thereof will come before us in our current articles on the doctrine of Reconciliation—to which we suggest the reader should turn after completing this one. It is in the grand mystery to which the apostle had alluded in the previous verses, in the constitution and outworking of the everlasting covenant, that the consummate *wisdom of God* is so illustriously and pre-eminently displayed, and which drew out the apostle's heart to give praise for this Divine excellency. O that wisdom may be given us to hold up to view this perfection of Him whose "understanding is infinite" (Psa 147:5).

"To God only wise." He is the only wise Being essentially, superlatively, eternally: cf. 1Ti 1:17, Jude 25. God is wise not by communication from another, but originally and independently; whereas the wisdom of the creature is but a ray from "the Father of lights." The wisdom of God is seen in all His ways and works, yet in some, it appears more conspicuously than in others. "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (Psa 104:24)—the reference being to His works in creation. The same adoring exclamation may be made of His works *in providence*, wherein He regulates all the complicated affairs of the universe and governs this world so that all things are made to redound unto His glory and work together for good to His people. But it is the marvelous plan of redemption, which may well be called the masterpiece at His wisdom. That is indeed "the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:" (1Co 2:7), containing as it does "the deep things of God" (1Co 2:10). So many were the problems to be solved (humanly speaking), so many the ways and means required, so great the variety of its exercise, that it is designated "the *manifold* wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

The consummate wisdom of God appears in devising a salvation for sinners, which otherwise had baffled forever the understanding of all finite intelligences. He contrived a way where they could have found none. Both the design of the Everlasting Covenant and the means ordained to be used are most worthy of God. "The mystery of His *will*" (Eph 1:9) is the foundation of it. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15). "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). As one of the Puritans expressed it, "His will set His wisdom to work." During recent years, Christian writers when treating of God's so-great salvation, have thrown most of their emphasis upon the *grace* which provided it and the *power* which effectuates it, and comparatively little attention has been given to *the wisdom* which planned it. God determined to work in a most glorious manner, and the end and the means were equally admirable. So grand and marvellous is the work of redemption, that when the angels were sent as ambassadors extraordinary to bring tidings of peace unto the world, they burst forth in that moving adoration, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luk 2:14).

The supreme end which God had in view was His own glory; the subordinate end, the recovery of His lapsed and ruined people. By the "Glory of God," it is meant the manifestation of Himself in the exercise of His attributes, the display of His perfections. In all the works of God, His excellencies are evidenced; but as some stars shine more brightly than others, so His perfections are more manifest in certain of His works; and as there is one heavenly body—which far surpasses all the planets—so the work of redemption greatly exceeds in wonder all the marvels of creation. It is here that wisdom and goodness, righteousness and mercy, holiness and grace, truth and peace, love and power, are united in their highest degree and beauty. Upon that account the apostle uses the expression, "the *glorious* Gospel of the blessed God" (1Ti 1:11), it being (as one has expressed it), "the unspotted mirror wherein the great and wonderful effects of Deity are set forth." It is the glorious work of redemption, which evokes the praise and thanksgiving of all the inhabitants of Heaven: Rev 5:12, 13.

In contemplating the possibility of redemption, the very attributes of God seem to be divided, and so, *against it*. Mercy was inclined to save; whereas, justice demanded the death of the transgressor. The majesty of God seemed to render it unworthy of His exalted greatness that He should treat with defiled dust. The veracity of God required the infliction of the penalty, which He had denounced against disobedience: the honour of His truth must be preserved. The holiness of God appeared to utterly preclude any advance toward depraved creatures. Yet the love of God was set upon them. But how could it flow forth without compromising His other perfections? What finite intelligence could have found a solution to such a problem! Suppose that the problem had been submitted to the angels, and after due deliberation, they had recognised that a *mediator* was necessary to heal the breach which sin had made, to reconcile God to sin-

ners and sinners to God. Suppose such a thing we say, and *where* was a suitable mediator to be found? Consider the qualifications he must possess.

In order to be eligible for such an undertaking, a mediator must be able to touch equally both extremes: he must be capable of the sentiments and affections at both the parties he would reconcile; he must be a just esteemer of the rights and injuries of the one and the other. But for that, he must possess the *nature* of both, so that he has in himself a common interest in both. Moreover, he must have sufficient merit as to secure the reward for many. But such an one was not to be found, either in heaven or in earth. Yet this absence did not defeat Omniscience: God determined to provide one, and that none other than His own Son. But how could that be! seeing He was possessed of the Divine nature only? Suppose *that* question had been submitted to the celestial spirits: had they not been forever at a loss to unravel the difficulty? Suppose further that God had made known to them that His Son should become incarnate, taking unto Himself human nature, the Word becoming flesh. Would they not still have been completely baffled, asking, How can such a prodigy be?

Admire then and adore the amazing *wisdom* of God in ordaining a Mediator fully qualified to reconcile God to men, and men to God. Marvel at such an exercise of omniscience that devised the virgin birth, whereby the Son became partaker of our nature without contracting the least iota of its defilement, whereby He was Immanuel both by nature and by office, whereby He was a fit Daysman (Job 9:33) to lay His hand on each of the estranged parties, whereby He had both zeal for God and compassion for men, and whereby He might serve as a Substitute on behalf of the guilty and make full satisfaction to the Divine justice in their stead. Moreover, Divine wisdom resolved this difficulty in such a way that so far from the glory of the Son being tarnished by the incarnation, it has been enhanced thereby—for He receives throughout the endless ages of eternity such a revenue of praise from His redeemed that the holy angels are incapable of rendering Him, while they themselves have been afforded additional grounds for adoring Him.

Consider also the *compass* of the Divine wisdom in taking occasion from the sin and fall of man to bring more glory to God and to raise man to a more excellent state. Sin, in its own nature, hath no tendency to good; it is not an apt medium, it hath no proper efficacy to promote the glory of God: so far is it from a direct contributing to it that, on the contrary, it is the most real dishonour to Him. But as a black background in a picture, which in itself only defiles, when placed by art, sets off the lighter colours and heightens their beauty, so the evil of sin, considered absolutely, obscures the glory of God, yet by the overruling disposition of His providence, serves to illustrate His name and to make it more glorious in the esteem of reasonable creatures. Without the sin of man, there had been no place *for* the most perfect exercise of God's goodness. Happy fault, not in itself, but by the wisdom and marvellous counsel of God, to be repaired in a way so advantageous that the salvation of the earth is the wonder of heaven.

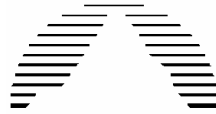
"The wisdom of God appears in ordaining such contemptible and, in appearance, opposite means, to accomplish such glorious effects. The way is as wonderful as the work. That Christ dying on the cross, a reputed malefactor, should be made our everlasting righteousness; that descending to the grave, He should bring up a lost world to life and immortality, is so incredible to our narrow understandings that He saves us and astonishes us at once. In nothing is it more visible that the thoughts of God are far above our thoughts and His ways above our ways as heaven is above the earth (Isa 55:8). It is a secret in physic to compound the most noble remedies of things destructive to nature, and thereby, make one death victorious over another: but that eternal life should spring from death, glory from ignominy, blessedness from a curse, is so repugnant to human sense that to render the belief of it easy, it was foretold by many prophets, that when it came to pass, it might be looked on as the effect of God's eternal counsels" (W. Bates, *The Harmony of the Divine Attributes*, 1680).

"To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (Rom 16:27). The Greek is somewhat complex and the R.V.² gives, more literally, "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen." As each translation is equally legitimate,³ we adopt them both, for each is in perfect harmony with other passages. The thought conveyed by the A.V. is: our adoration of God is possible only through the *mediation* of Jesus Christ. The concept expressed by the R.V. is: it is in and through Jesus

² R.V. – Revised Version, or Revised Standard Version.

³ *Chapel Library* specifically does not agree with this. The RSV and most modern translations do not use the *Textus Receptus* Greek text, instead depending upon what we and many scholars deem to be inferior though older manuscripts. Translations which do use the *Textus Receptus* are the KJV (also referred to as the Authorized Version, A.V.), the NKJV, and the ESV. *Chapel Library* uses the KJV in its publications.

Christ that God is superlatively *manifested* as both infinite in might and omniscient in knowledge. “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24): in and by the person and work of Christ are these Divine perfections supremely displayed—He is “The Image of the invisible God” (Co1 1:19), “the Brightness [or ‘outshining’] of His glory” (Heb 1:3). The *Object* of this doxology is the omnipotent and omniscient God; the *subject* which gives rise to it is the “mystery” or “Everlasting Covenant;” the *substance* of it is “be glory forever;” the *medium* of it, “Jesus Christ.” —AWP



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THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

20. Twelfth Miracle

We have entitled this series of articles, "The Mission and Miracles of Elisha," and as we pointed out in our Introductory paper, much the larger part of what is recorded of the life of this prophet is devoted to a description of the miracles performed by him and the circumstances or occasions which gave rise to them. Excepting that which occupied our attention in the first two or three articles, when we contemplated the preparing and enduing of him for his work, very little indeed has been said about Elisha's mission or ministry up to the point we have now reached in his history. Yet here and there, brief hints have been given us of that which engaged most of his energies. Those hints centre around the several brief mentions made of "the sons of the prophets" and the relation which Elisha sustained to them, a further reference to whom is found in the passage, which is now to be before us. As we pointed out under the previous series on Elijah, Israel had fallen on bad times and their spirituality was at a low ebb. Idolatry was rampant and God's judgments fell frequently upon them—in the form of suffering the surrounding nations to invade their land (1Ki 20:1, 26; 22:1; 2Ki 1:1; 5:2).

From the brief allusion made to them, it would seem that Elisha devoted much of his time and attention to the training of young preachers, who were formed into schools and designated "the sons of the prophets"—which in the Hebrew language would emphasise the nature of their calling and contain no reference to their ancestry. There was one group of them at Bethel and another at Jericho (2Ki 2:3, 5) and yet another at Gilgal (2Ki 4:38). It is from the last reference we learn that Elisha was wont to sojourn with them for a season and preach or lecture to them, as their "sitting before him" signifies (Deu 33:3; Luk 2:46; 10:39); and from the repeated mention of "the people" in this connection (2Ki 4:41, 42) we gather that these seminaries also served as more general places of assembly whither the pious in Israel gathered together for the worship of Jehovah and to receive edification through His servant. That Elisha acted as rector or superintendent of these schools is evident from the young prophets owning him as "*thou* man of God" (2Ki 4:40) and "master" (2Ki 6:5).

First, *its connection*. "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us" (2Ki 6:1). By means of the opening "And" the Holy Spirit has linked together the miracle recorded at the end of chapter 5 and the one we are now to consider. As in previous instances, it points both comparisons and contrasts. Each miracle concerned those who were intimately connected with Elisha—in the one case, his personal attendant; in the other, his students. Each occurred at the same place—in the immediate vicinity of the Jordan. Each was occasioned by dissatisfaction with the position its subjects occupied—the one reprehensible, the other commendable. But there, it was the unfaithful Gehazi; while here, it was the devoted sons of the prophets. In the one, Gehazi took matters into his own hands; in the other, they deferentially asked permission of their master. In the former, an act of theft was committed; in the latter, a borrowed article was recovered. In that, a curse descended upon the guilty one; in this, an article was retrieved from the place of judgment.

Second, *its occasion*. "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us" (2Ki 6:1). There does not appear to us to be anything in this verse, which justifies the conclusion that some have drawn from it, namely, that these young men were discontented with their quarters and lusted after something more congenial. Charity always requires us to place the best construction on the projects and actions of our fellows. The motives which prompt them lie beyond our purview, and therefore, are outside of our province; and actions are to be condemned only when it is unmistakably clear that they are evil in their nature or tendency. Had these students given expression to a covetous desire, surely Elisha had reproved them; certainly, he would not have encouraged their plan, as the sequel shows he did.

We are not told which particular school of the prophets this one was, but from its proximity to the Jordan, there can be little doubt that it was the one situated either at Jericho or Gilgal—most probably the latter, because the reference in 2 Kings 4:38 seems to indicate that it was there that Elisha made his principal headquarters. This appears to be confirmed by the language used by the students, "where we *dwell* with thee" (2Ki 6:1)—they had said, "sojourn" had he been merely on a temporary visit to them. From their

statement, we gather that under the superintendency of Elisha, their school had flourished, that there had been such an increase of their numbers, the accommodation had become too cramped for them. Accordingly, they respectfully called the attention of their master to what seemed a real need. It is to be observed that they did not impudently take matters into their own hands and attempt to 'spring a surprise' upon Elisha, but becomingly pointed out to him the exigency of the situation.

"Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell" (2Ki 6:2). Had their desire for more spacious quarters proceeded from carnal ambition, they had aspired to something more imposing than a wooden building; nor is it at all likely that in such a case, they had volunteered to do the work themselves—rather had they suggested going around with collecting cards, soliciting gifts from the people, so that they might have the money to hire others to erect a more commodious seminary for them. "They were humble men who did not affect that which was gay or great. They did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for the great in the *other* world to be content with mean things in *this*" (Matthew Henry). Alas, that Protestants have so often aped the Romanists in making a show before the world.

"And he answered, Go ye" (2Ki 6:2), which he surely had not done if they had become discontented with their humble quarters and were lusting after some thing more agreeable to the flesh. That reply of Elisha's was something more than a bare assent to their proposal or permission for them to execute the same; it was also a real testing of their hearts. Those who are accustomed to judge harshly of others might infer that these young men had grown tired of the strict discipline which Elisha must have enforced, and had found irksome the pious and devotional type of life he required from them, and that this idea of making for the Jordan was but a cover for their determination to get away from the man of God. In such a case, they had promptly availed themselves of his grant, bidden him farewell, and promptly taken their departure.

But we may learn something more from this answer, "Go ye": it gives us a sidelight on the prophet's own character, manifesting as it does his *humility*. He at once perceived the reasonableness of their request and concurred with them therein, whereas a proud and haughty man had quickly resented any suggestion coming from those under his charge or care. Thus, an important practical lesson is here inculcated: superiors ought not to deem themselves above receiving and weighing ideas from their inferiors, and when discerning the wisdom of the same and recognising they could be carried out to advantage, should not hesitate to adopt them. It is the mark of a little mind, and not of a great one, which considers it has a monopoly of intelligence and is independent of help from others. Many a man has paid dearly for disdainful counsel of his wife or employees.

"And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants" (2Ki 6:3). Very blessed is this, revealing as it does the happy relations, which existed between them and of the veneration and love these students had for their master. Such meekness and graciousness on the part of superiors, as we have alluded to above, is not unappreciated by their inferiors. Right nobly did they respond to the test contained in Elisha's "Go ye," by begging him to accompany them on their expedition. And how such a request on their part refutes the evil inference which some might draw from their original proposal—jumping to the conclusion that they were tired of Elisha's company and merely devised this plan as a pretext to get away from him. A warning to us not to surmise evil of our fellows, giving point to Christ's admonition, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Joh 7:24).

Third, *its location*: the Jordan. "And he answered, I will go. So he went with them" (2Ki 6:3,4). And a good thing it was that he did so, as the sequel shows. "And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood" (2Ki 6:4). Very commendable was this. But how unlike the pampered and spoiled young people of our generation who have been encouraged to expect that some one else will do everything for them, that they should be waited on hand and foot by their seniors. These young men were willing and ready to put their own shoulder to the work. They did not seek to shelter behind a false conception of their sacred calling and indulge a foolish pride or papish-like exaltation of their office by concluding that such a thing was beneath their dignity, considering themselves far too superior to engage in manual labour. No, instead of hiring others to do it, they performed the task themselves.

"But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed" (2Ki 6:5). An accident now happened. In one sense, it is perfectly true that there are no accidents in a world that is presided over by the living God; but in another sense, it is equally true that accidents *do* occur in the human realm. This calls for a defining of our term: what is an accident? It is when

some effect is produced or some consequence issues from an action *undesigned* by its performer. From the Divine side of things, nothing occurs in this world, but what God has ordained; but from the human side, many things result from our action, which were not intended by us. It was no design of this man that he should lose the head of his axe: that he did so was accidental on his part.

Fourth, its *purpose*: To recover a borrowed article. “And he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” How strange that such a thing should happen while in the performance of duty! Yet the Lord had a wise and good reason for permitting the same, and mercifully prevented the death of another (Deu 19:5). It is to be duly noted that he did not regard Elisha as being too great a man to be troubled about such a trifling matter, but as an honest person deeply concerned over the loss, and assured of his master’s sympathy, he at once informed him. His “alas” seems to denote that he regarded his loss as final and had no expectation it would be retrieved by a miracle. The lesson for us is plain: even though (to our shame) we have no faith, of His showing Himself strong on our behalf, it is ever our duty and privilege to spread before our Master everything that troubles us.

*“Not one concern of ours is small
If we belong to Him,
To teach us this, the Lord of all
Once made the iron to swim”* – John Newton.

Fifth, its *means*. “And the man of God said” (2Ki 6:6)—observe the change from verse 1: not simply “Elisha” here, because he was about to act officially and work a miracle. “Where fell it?”: this was designed to awaken hope in him. “And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim” (2Ki 6:6). There was no proportion between the means and the end—to demonstrate the power was of God! The Hebrew word for “stick” is a generic one. It is rendered “tree” 162 times, being the same word as in Exodus 15:25; Deuteronomy 21:22—quoted in Galatians 3:13! It is also translated “wood” 103 times, as in Genesis 6:14, the shittim “wood” used in connection with the frame and furniture of the Tabernacle, and in verse 4 of our passage. Evidently, it was a small tree or sapling Elisha cut down, and the above references make clear its typical import.

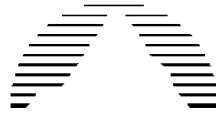
Sixth, its *meaning*. The incident which has been before us may, we consider, be justly regarded as broadly illustrating what is portrayed by the Law and the Gospel. It serves to give us a typical picture of the sinner’s ruin and redemption. As the result of being dissatisfied with the position God originally assigned us—subjection to His authority—we (in Adam) appropriated what was not ours, and in consequence suffered a fearful fall. The inanimate iron falling into the Jordan—the place of “judgment”—is an apt figure of the elect in their natural state: dead in trespasses and sins, incapable of doing ought for their deliverance. The way and means which God took for our recovery was for Christ to come right down to where we were, and to be “cut off” (Dan 9:26), yea, “cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa 53:8), enduring Judgment on our behalf, thereby recovering us to God (1Pe 3:18).

This incident may also be taken as informing the believer *how lost blessing* may be restored to him. Are there not among our readers some who no longer enjoy the liberty they once had in prayer or the satisfaction they formerly experienced in reading the Scriptures? Are there not some who have lost their peace and assurance, and are deeply concerned of being so deprived? If so, the Devil will say the loss is irrecoverable and you must go mourning the rest of your days. But that is one of his many lies. This passage reveals how your situation may be retrieved. 1. Acquaint your Master with your grief (2Ki 6:5): unbosom yourself freely and frankly unto Him. 2. Let His “Where fell it?” (2Ki 6:6) search you. Examine yourself, review the past, ascertain the place or point in your life where the blessing ceased, discover the personal *cause* of your spiritual loss, judge yourself for the failure and confess it, acknowledging the blame to be entirely yours. 3. Avail yourself and make use of the means for recovery: cast in the “stick” or “tree” (2Ki 6:6): that is, plead the merits of Christ’s cross (1Pe 2:24). 4. Stretch forth the hand of faith (2Ki 6:7), that is, count upon your Master’s infinite goodness and grace, *expect* His effectual intervention, and the lost blessing shall be restored to you.

This incident may also be viewed as making known to us how we may *grow in grace*. 1. There must be the desire and prayer for spiritual expansion (2Ki 6:1)—a longing to enter into and possess the “large place” (Psa 118:5) God has provided for us. 2. The recognition that to enter therein involves effort from us (2Ki 6:2), labour on our part. 3. Seek the oversight of a servant of God in this (2Ki 6:3) if he be available. 4. Observe very carefully the particular place to which we must betake ourselves if such spiritual enlargement is to be ours. It is “the Jordan” and that speaks of *death*: we can only enter into an enriched spiritual

experience by dying more and more unto the flesh, that is, by denying self, and mortifying our lusts (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). 5. Expect to encounter difficulties (2Ki 6:5). 6. Use the appointed means (2Ki 6:6) for overcoming the obstacle of the flesh (Gal 6:14). 7. Stretch forth the hand of faith (2Ki 6:7) and appropriate what God has given us in Christ.

Seventh, *its lessons*. 1. See the value of requesting our Master's presence even when about to engage in manual labour. 2. Be conscientious about borrowed articles—*books* for example! We should be more careful about things loaned us than those which are our own. 3. Despise not those engaged in manual labour: Elisha did not. 4. Let not the servant of God disdain what may seem trifling opportunities to do good. 5. Remember your Father cares for His people in their minutest concerns. 6. Is anything too hard for Him who made the iron to swim? 7. What encouragement is here for us to heed, Philippians 4:6! —AWP



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SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4d. Its Nature

3. Spiritual growth consists of a greater love for God.

When pointing out the various aspects of regeneration (in the June article) we quoted Romans 5:5: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Contrary to the commentators, we do not regard the reference there as being to God’s love for His people, but rather one of the blessed effects or consequents of the same. First, because the scope and unity of the whole context requires such an interpretation. In Romans 5:1-11, the apostle enumerates a sevenfold result of our being justified by faith: we have peace with God (v. 1), we are established in His favour (v. 2), we rejoice in hope (v. 2), we are enabled to benefit from trials (vv. 3, 4), we have a hope that fails not (v. 5), our hearts are drawn out to God (v. 5), we are assured of final preservation (vv. 6-10). Second, the relation of the second half of verse 5 (“because”) to the first leads to the same conclusion: it is *our* love to God which furnishes evidence that our hope is a valid one. Third, God’s love for us is in Himself, and though manifested unto us could scarcely be said to be “shed abroad in our hearts.” Verse 8 clearly distinguishes His love toward us.

By nature, the elect have not one particle of love for God: nay, their very minds are enmity against Him. But He does not leave them forever in that fearful state. No, having from eternity set His heart upon them, He has determined to win their hearts unto Himself. And how is that accomplished? By shedding abroad His love in their hearts, which we understand to denote by communicating from Himself a spiritual principle of love, which qualifies and enables them to love Him. Faith is His gift to them (Eph 2:8), and the evidence of that principle being in them is that they now believe and trust in Him. Hope is also His gift to them (2Th 2:16), for prior to regeneration, we had “no hope” (Eph 2:12), and the evidence of that principle being in us is that we have a confident expectation of the future. In like manner, love is also a Divine gift, and the evidence of that principle being in an individual is that he now loves God, loves His Christ, loves His image in His people. Note how in Romans 5, we have the Christian’s faith (v. 1), hope (vv. 4, 5) and love (v. 5)—which are the three great dynamics and regulators of the Christian life.

This Divine virtue which is communicated to the hearts of all Christians is that which moves their affections to cleave unto God in Christ as their supreme Good. It is designated “the love of God” because *He* is the Bestower of it, because He is the Object of it, and because He is the Increaser and Perfecter of it. It is first stirred unto action or drawn out to God when the soul apprehends His love for him, for “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1Jo 4:19), for so long as we feared His wrath we hated Him. This particular grace is the one which most affects the others: if the heart be kept right, the head will not go far wrong; but when love cools, every grace languishes. Hence, we find the apostle praying for the Ephesian saints, that they might be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). As the Christian grows, he learns to love God not only for what He has done for him, but chiefly for what He is in Himself—the infinitely glorious One, the Sum of all perfection. Yet our love for Him is easily chilled—through the heart’s being turned unto other objects. In fact, of all our graces, this one is the most sensitive and delicate and needs the most cherishing and guarding: Mat 24:12; Rev 2:5.

The force of what has just been pointed out appears in that exhortation, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jud 1:21). Negatively, that means, avoid everything which would chill and dampen it: careless living soon dulls our sense of God’s love. Eschew whatever would grieve the Spirit or thereby give Him occasion to convict us of our sins and occupy us with our waywardness, instead of taking the things of Christ and showing them unto us (Joh 16:14). Shun the embraces of the world, keeping yourselves from idols (1Jo 5:21). Positively, it signifies: use the appointed means for keeping your affections warm and lively, set on things above. Familiarise yourself with God’s holy Word, regarding it as a series of letters from your heavenly Father. Cultivate communion with Him by prayer and frequent meditations on His perfections. Keep up a fresh sense of His love for you, sunning your soul in the enjoyment of it. Above all, adhere strictly to the path of obedience. When the Lord Jesus bade us “continue ye in My love”, He at once went on to explain how we may do so: “If ye *keep* My commandments ye *shall* abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (Joh 15: 9, 10, cf. 1Jo 5:3).

A deeper and increasing love for God is not to be ascertained so much by our consciousness of the same as by the evidences it produces. There are many who sing and talk about how much they love Christ, but their walk gives the lie to their avowals. On the other hand, there are some who bemoan the feebleness of their love and the coldness of their affections, whose lives make it manifest that their hearts beat true to Him. Feelings are no safe criterion in this matter: it is conduct which is the surest index to it. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the holiest saint who ever walked this earth, who enjoyed the most intimate fellowship with the Lord, would be the first to acknowledge and bewail the inadequacy of his affection for Him whose love passeth knowledge. Nevertheless, there *is* such a thing as a growing love for God in Christ, and the same is demonstrated by a stronger bent of soul toward Him, the mind being more stayed upon Him, the heart enjoying more communion with Him and greater delight in Him, and the conscience increasingly exercised in our care to please Him. The more we are spiritually engaged with God's love for us, the more will our affections to Him be inflamed.

4. *Spiritual growth consists of the strengthening and enlarging of our faith.*

Faith is the gift of God (Eph 2:8), by which is signified that it is a spiritual principle, grace or virtue which He communicates to the hearts of His elect at their regeneration. And as His "talents" are bestowed upon us to trade with, to profit by and increase, so the principle of faith is given us to *use* and employ to the glory of God. Its first act is to believe Christ, to trust in Him, and as Colossians 2:6 bids us, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in Him." That is a most comprehensive and summarised exhortation, and would require many details in order to furnish a full explanation of it. For example, it might be pointed out that the Christian is called upon to walk humbly, dependently, submissively or obediently; yet all of these are included in faith itself. Faith is a humbling and self-emptying grace, for it is the stretching forth of the beggar's hand to receive God's bounty. Faith is an acknowledgement of my own insufficiency and need, a leaning upon One who is mighty to save. Faith is also an act of the will, whereby it surrenders to the authority of Christ and receives Him as King to reign over our hearts and lives. Thus, though there is much more in it than this, yet the prime and essential force of Colossians 2:6 is: as ye became Christians at the first by an act of faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, *continue* trusting in Him and let your life be regulated by faith—"walk" denotes progress or going forward.

In Hebrews 10:38, we are told "now the just shall live by faith." A very elementary statement is that, yet one which is turned into a serious error the moment we tamper with or change its pronoun. We are not justified *because of* our faith, but because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, but that righteousness is not actually reckoned to our account until we believe—instrumentally we are "justified by faith" (Rom 5:1). Nor are the justified bidden to "live *upon* their faith," though many vainly attempt to do so. No, the believer is to live upon Christ, yet it is only by *faith* he can do so. Let us be as simple as possible: I break my fast with food, yet I partake of that food by means of a spoon. I feed myself, yet it is the food and not the spoon I eat. It was said of Esau "*by* thy sword shalt thou live" (Gen 27:40), not *on* thy sword—he could not eat *it*. Esau would live on what his sword brought in. The Christian makes a serious blunder when he attempts to live upon the faith he fancies he can find or feel within himself; rather is he to feed upon the Word, and this he does only so far as faith is operative—as faith lays hold of and appropriates its holy and blessed contents.

"Now the just shall live by faith" (Heb 10:38) may well be regarded as the text of the sermon which follows immediately in the next chapter, for in Hebrews 11, we are shown at great length and in considerable variety of detail how the O.T. saints exercised that God-given principle, how they lived by faith, and wrought great wonders by it. Nothing is there said of their courage, zeal, patience, but all their works and triumphs are attributed to *faith*: the reason for this being that their courage, zeal and patience were the fruits of faith. As it was with them, so it is with us: we are called to "walk by faith" (2Co 5:7), and the extent to which we do so will determine the measure of success or failure in our Christian lives. As the Lord Jesus declared unto the two blind beggars who besought His mercy, "According to your *faith* be it unto you" (Mat 9:29) and to the father of the demon-possessed child, "all things *are* possible to him that believeth" (Mar 9:23). If we are straitened it is not in God but in ourselves, for He ever responds to reliance in and counting upon His intervention. He has expressly promised to honour those who honour Him, and nothing honours Him more than a firm and childlike faith in Him.

"The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Such a testimony from the chief of the apostles shows us the place which faith has in the Christian life. This expression "the faith of the Son of God" signifies that He is the grand *Object*

of faith, the One on whom it is to be exercised—which should help the reader to the better understanding of “the love of God” in Romans 5:5 and our remarks thereon. The Christian’s is essentially a life of faith, and in proportion as his faith is not operative does he fail to live the Christian life. A life of faith consists of faith being engaged with Christ, drawing on Him, receiving from Him the supply of every need. The life of faith begins by looking to Christ, trusting in Him, relying wholly upon Him as our righteousness before God, and it is continued by looking to and trusting in Him for everything else. Faith is to look to Christ for *wisdom*, that we may be able to understand all that He has revealed concerning God, ourselves, salvation, our various duties. Faith is to lay hold of His precepts and appropriate His promises. But more especially, faith is to look to Christ for *strength* to perform His precepts acceptably. As we have no righteousness of our own, so no strength; we are as dependent upon Him for the one as for the other, and each is obtained from Him *by faith*.

But at this most vital point, many of the Lord’s people have been grievously misled. Under the guise of debasing the creature and exalting Divine grace, they have been made to believe that they are quite helpless in this matter: that as God alone is the Imparter of faith, so He alone is the Increaser of it, and that they have to meekly submit to His Will, as to the measure of faith He bestow, or as to what He withholds from them. The consequence is that so far from their faith increasing, they are for the most part, left to spend their remaining days on earth in a state full of doubtings and fears. And what is still worse, many of them feel *no blame* or reproach for the feebleness of their faith, but instead, blatantly attribute it to the sovereignty of God. If such people rebuked a godless drunkard for his intemperance, they would be justly shocked were he to reply, “God has not given me grace to overcome my thirst;” and yet, when they are reprov’d for their unbelief, they virtually charge God with it, by saying that He has not granted them a larger measure of faith. What wicked slander! What a horrible misuse of the truth of God’s sovereign grace. The blame is theirs, and they should honestly acknowledge it and penitently confess it before Him.

It is perfectly true that God is the Increaser, as well as the Giver of faith, but it certainly does not follow from this that *we* have no responsibility in the matter. The littleness and weakness of my faith is entirely my own fault: due not to God’s unwillingness to give me more, but to my sinful failure to *want* what He has already given me! to my not crying earnestly unto Him, “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luk 17:5), and to my woeful neglect in making a proper use of the means He has appointed for my obtaining an increase of it. When the disciples were filled with terror of the tempest and awoke their Master, saying “carest Thou not that we perish” (Mar 4:38), He reprov’d them for their unbelief, saying “Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith?” (Mat 8:26): *that* was far from inculcating the deadly delusion that they had no responsibility concerning the measure and strength of their faith! On another occasion, He said to His disciples, “O fools, and slow of heart, to believe” (Luk 24:25), which plainly signified that they were to blame for their lack of faith and were to be admonished for their unbelief.

If I have surrendered myself to the Lordship of Christ and trusted in Him as an all-sufficient Saviour, then Christ is *mine*, and I may *know* He is mine upon the infallible authority of God’s Word. Since Christ *is* mine, then it is both my privilege and duty to obtain an increasing knowledge of and acquaintance with Him, through the Scriptures. It is my privilege and duty to “trust in Him at *all* times” (Psa 62:8), to make known to Him my every need and to count upon Him to graciously supply the same. It is my privilege and duty to make full use of Christ, to live upon Him, to draw from His fulness (Joh 1:16), to freely avail myself of His sufficiency to meet my every want. It is my privilege and duty to store up His precepts and promises in my memory, that the one may direct my conduct and the other support my soul. It is the office of faith to obtain from Him strength for the former and comfort from the latter, *expecting* Him to make good His word, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:” (Mat 7:7). It is my privilege and duty to “mix with faith” (Heb 4:2) every recorded sentence that fell from His sacred lips, and according as I do so shall I be “nourished up” (1Ti 4:6)—my faith will be fed, thrive, and become stronger.

But if on the other hand, I walk by sight, if I constantly take my eyes off their proper Object, and am all the time looking within at my corruptions, I shall go backward and not forward. If I am more concerned about my inward comforts than I am about my outward walk in the pleasing of Christ, in earnestly seeking to follow the example He has left me, then the Holy Spirit will be grieved and will cease taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto me. If I form the habit of attempting to view the promises of God through the darkened and thick lens of my difficulties, instead of looking at my difficulties in the light of God’s promises, then defeat—rather than victory—will inevitably follow. If I turn my eyes from my all-

sufficient Saviour and am occupied with the winds and waves of my circumstances, then like Peter of old, I shall begin to sink. If I do not make it my daily and diligent business to resist the workings of unbelief in my heart and cry out to Christ for strength to enable me so to do, then faith will surely suffer an eclipse, and the fault will be entirely my own. If I neglect feeding upon “the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1Ti 4:6), then my faith will necessarily be weak and languishing.

We say again that the Christian life is a life of *faith*, and just so far as the believer is not actuated by this spiritual principle, does he fail at the most vital point. But let it be said very emphatically that a life of faith is not the mystical and nebulous thing which far too many imagine, but an intensely practical one. Nor is it the monopoly of men like George Muller and those who go forth to preach the Gospel in foreign lands without any guaranteed salary or belonging to any human organisation, trusting God alone for the supply of their every need; rather is it the birthright and privilege of *every* child of God. Nor is it a life made up of ecstasies and rapturous experiences, lived up in the clouds: no, it is to be worked out on the common level of everyday life. The man or the woman whose conduct is regulated by the Divine precepts and whose heart is sustained by the Divine promises, who performs his or her ordinary duties as unto the Lord, looking to Him for wisdom, strength and patience for the discharge thereof, and who counts upon His blessing on the same, is living a life of faith as truly as is the most zealous and self-sacrificing preacher.

It is true we must be on our guard against unwarrantably exalting the means and making them a substitute for the Lord Himself. The doctrine, the precepts and the promises of Scripture are so many windows through which we are to behold *God*. It is our privilege and duty to look to Him for His blessing upon the means, and since He has appointed the same to count upon His sanctifying them to us, expecting Him to make them effectual. But we must conclude our remarks upon this point by mentioning some of the *evidences* of a deepening and increasing faith. It is a proof of a stronger and larger faith when the soul is more established in the Truth, when there is a steadier confidence in God, and when we make a greater use of His promises. When we are less influenced and affected by what other professing Christians believe, resting our souls alone on a “thus saith the LORD” (1Co 2:5). When we live more out of ourselves and more upon Christ. When many of His unregenerate disciples are turning away from Christ and He says, “Will ye also go away?” and we can answer, “to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life” (Joh 6:66-69). When we have become conscientious and diligent in the performing of our duties, for faith is shown by its works (Jam 2:17, 18).

5. Spiritual growth consists of advancing in personal piety.

Our space is nearly exhausted, but this article would be sadly incomplete if we omitted all reference to progress in practical godliness. As various aspects of this will come before us (D.V.)⁴ under the next branch of our subject, there is the less need now to enter into much detail. As the Christian obtains an enlarged spiritual apprehension of God’s perfections, not only is his heart increasingly affected by His wondrous goodness and grace, but he is more and more awed by His high sovereignty and ineffable holiness, so that he has a deeper reverence for Him and His fear a larger place in his heart, ever exerting a more potent influence in his approaches to Him and on his deportment and conduct. In like manner, as the Christian becomes better acquainted with the personal offices and work of Christ, he obtains not only a fuller realisation of how much he owes to Him and what he has in Him, but he is made more and more conscious of what is due unto Him and what becomes one who is a follower of the Lord till glory. The better he realises that he is “not his own, but bought with a price,” the more will he resolve and endeavour to glorify God in Christ “in (his) body, and in (his) spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19, 20), longing more ardently for the time when he will be able to do so without let or hindrance. —AWP

⁴ D.V. – *Deo volente*, “as God wills” or “if the Lord wills.”

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

4b. Its Author

In our last we were only able to barely mention that the *wisdom* of God was engaged in the salvation of His people. Before we attempt to illustrate this particular aspect, let us point out that it was in His character of *Judge* that the Father then acted. It is most important that this should be recognised, yea, essential if we are to view our subject from the correct angle, for reconciliation was entirely a judicial procedure. In Hebrews 12:23, God the Father is expressly spoken of as “the Judge of all,” which is an official title. He it was who passed sentence upon sinning Adam and all whom he represented as a federal head. None but “the Judge of all” could have “made Christ to be sin” for His people, or them to be “the righteousness of God in Him” (2Co 5:21). “*It is* God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33): that is, it is the Father as “the Judge of all” who actually and formally pronounces righteous in His sight the sinner who believes on Christ. It is on this two-fold ground that the apostle there argues the irreversibility of our justification: that the sentence of justification is pronounced by the Supreme Judge, and that, on the basis of the full satisfaction which has been made to Him by Christ.

We closed our last by calling attention to the fact that the determination of the Father to recover His lapsed people is described as “the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the *counsel* of His own will” (Eph 1:11), which signifies there was an exercise of His infinite understanding in devising how that resolve should be made good to His own glory. To speak after the manner of men, the Father consulted with Himself, called His omniscience into play, and drew up a plan in which His “*manifold wisdom*” (Eph 3:10) is exemplified. That many-sided plan is termed “the mystery” because it has to do with “the deep things of God” (1Co 2:7, 10). “There is variety in the mystery and mystery in every part of the variety. It was not one single act, but a variety at ‘counsels’ met in it: a conjunction of excellent ends and means” (Charnock). What those excellent ends and means were, we shall now try to set forth, yet knowing full well that our utmost efforts can convey only a most inadequate and fragmentary idea of what will be our wonderment and admiration for all eternity. God’s consummate and manifold wisdom is seen.

1. In Love’s triumph over the Law. We begin here because it the better links up with the closing paragraphs of our last and the opening one of this. Continuing that line of thought, be it said, the solution to the problems raised by sin and the harmonization of Love and Law is termed a “mystery,” because it transcends human reason and can only be known by Divine revelation. It is called “the hidden wisdom” of God, because it remained an impenetrable secret until He was pleased to disclose it. No discovery of it was made in creation. Though “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork,” yet they gave no indication it is His will to show mercy unto rebels: rather does the universe exhibit an inexorable reign of law. If a devoted mother gives her child medicine from the wrong bottle, the result will be the same as if an enemy poured poison down its throat. Break one of Nature’s laws, even in ignorance, and no matter how deep our regret, there is no escaping the penalty. Divine Love has triumphed over the Law not by trampling upon it, but by fully meeting its demands and rendering it honourable. Divine wisdom contrived a way in which there was no compromise between Love and Law, but each was given fullest expression.

The way in which God has dealt with what to human wit appears insolvable, both manifests His perfect wisdom and greatly redounds to His glory. He has dealt with the problem raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law and settling it on a righteous basis. The needs-be for that is evident. Sin is far too great an evil for man to meddle with and every attempt he assays in that direction only makes bad matters worse—as appears in both the social and international spheres. Still more is this the case when man attempts to treat with God: his very efforts to remove sin do but aggravate it, and any attempt to approach God in spite of it only serves to increase his guilt. None but God is capable of dealing with sin, either as a crime or as pollution, as that which is a dishonour to Him, or as it is, a barrier to our access to Him. Moreover, as sin is too great an evil for us to deal with, so righteousness is too high for the fallen creature to reach unto, yea too high for holy creatures to bring down to us. Only God Himself can bring near His righteousness (Isa 46:13).

Yes, God has dealt with the momentous issue raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law. For fallen man to have taken it there would have inevitably meant the losing of his case, for he is a transgressor of the Divine statute and a moral bankrupt, utterly unable to make any reparation for his offence. But His

consummate wisdom enabled the Judge of all to deal with it in such a manner that the honour of His Law has been maintained unimpeached, and yet, the case has been settled on a basis equally favourable to God and that sinner! Settled in such a way that the wondrous love of God is free to flow forth unto His elect, children of disobedience though they be in themselves, without ignoring or condoning their disobedience, and so that His love remains a *holy* love. It is on that judicial settlement that an all sufficient and final answer has been furnished to man's anguished and age-long questions, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4); "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD?" (Mic 6:6).

2. In exercising two Contrary principles in Redemption. This is an achievement worthy of Omniscience. God is love, nevertheless, He is "light" (1Jo 1:5) as well: not only is He full of kindness and benevolence, but He is immaculately pure and holy. God is abundant in mercy, but He is also just and "will by no means clear *the guilty*" (Exo 34:7). Here then are two of the Divine perfections moving in opposite directions: how can such contraries be reconciled? Love goes out unto the prodigal, but Light cannot look upon iniquity (Hab 1:13). Mercy would fain spare the offender, but justice demands his punishment. Grace is ready to bestow a gratuitous salvation, but righteousness insists that the defaulter cannot be released till he has "paid the uttermost farthing" (Mat 5:26). Shall then the tenderness of the Father yield to the severity of the Judge? or shall the rights of the Judge give place to the desire of the Father? Each must be satisfied. But how? Admire and adore that wondrous wisdom which devised a means whereby, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psa 85:10).

It is said God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. Yet that provides no solution to the problem, for the question still returns, Will God sink His love to the sinner in His hatred of his sin? or allow His love for the sinner to override His hatred of his sin? God has sworn, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4); but He has also sworn, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze 33:11). The oath of justice and the oath of pity appear irreconcilable: must then one yield to the other? No, both must stand. But how? In redemption, God has manifested two opposite perfections at the same time, and in one action, in which there is shown supreme hatred of sin and superlative love of the sinner. Justice and mercy has alike maintained its ground without compromise, yea, has issued from the conflict honourable and glorious. Divine wisdom contrived plan whereby God has punished transgression without scourging the transgressors, and has repaired the ruin of the sinner without condoning his sin.

3. In appointing a suitable Mediator. Clearly, this was the first step necessary in order to a solution of the intricate problems to which we have alluded. The fall of man placed him at an immeasurable *distance* from God—"your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa 59:2). Not only so, but the fall produced an infinite moral *difference*, man becoming polluted and a hater of God, God Himself ineffably holy and at legal enmity with man. Such a breach appeared unbridgeable. For on the one hand, it became not the glory of His nature, nor the honour of His government, for God to make any direct advance towards rebellious subjects; and on the other hand, man had no desire to be restored to His image or favour, and even if he had, was barred from any access to Him. Thus, all intercourse between God and men was at an end; an *impasse* was created; an utterly hopeless situation seemed to exist. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29), and who was there that could interpose himself between Him and us? But Divine wisdom provided a means and remedy, decreeing there should be a Mediator who would bridge the distance and heal the difference between them, affecting a mutual reconciliation.

But where was such an one to be found? that was capable of laying his hand upon both (Job 9:33)? He must be entirely clear of any participation in the offence. He must, on account of his personal excellence, stand high in the esteem of the injured One. He must be a person of exalted dignity if the weight of his mediation was to bear any proportion to the magnitude of the crime and the value of the favour he would confer. He must be able to fully maintain the interests and subserve the honour of God. He must also possess a tender compassion towards the wretched offenders or he would not cordially interest himself on their behalf. And to give greater fitness to such a procedure, it would be eminently proper that he should be intimately related to each of the parties. But where was one with so many and so necessary qualifications to be found? There was no creature worthy of so high office and so honourable an undertaking, no, not "in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth" (Rev 5:3). None but Omniscience had ever thought of appointing God's own beloved and co-equal Son to take upon Him our nature.

4. In the union of such diverse natures in the person of Christ. It was necessary that the Mediator should be a *Divine* person in order that He might be independent and not the mere creature of either party;

in order that He might reveal the Father (Joh 1:18; 14:9), in order to render unto the Law an obedience He did not owe for Himself (as all creatures do) and be one of infinite value; and in order that He might be capacitated to administer the realms of providence and grace, which are committed to Him as Mediatorial Prince (Mat 28:18; Joh 17:2). None other than God can forgive sins, impart eternal life, restore the fallen creature to true liberty, or bestow the Holy Spirit. Yet it was equally necessary that the Mediator should be *Man*: in order that He might truly represent men as “the last Adam” (1Co 15:45), in order that He might be “made under the law” (Gal 4:4) to obey it, in order that He could suffer its death-penalty, and in order that, in His glorified humanity, He might be Head of the Church. He was to be “the Apostle and High Priest” (Heb 3:1): God’s Apostle unto us, our “High Priest” with God, for He must both pacify God’s wrath and remove our enmity.

But how furnish the Son for His office? How become partaker of human nature without contracting its corruption? How unite Godhood and manhood, the Infinite with the finite, Immortality with mortality, Almighty with weakness? How produce such a union that the two natures were perfectly wedded in one Person and yet preserve their distinctness, conjoined yet not confounded? so that the Deity was not changed into flesh, nor flesh transformed into God? Before the Word’s becoming flesh, must we not exclaim, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Rom 11:33). By that unique and wondrous union, Christ was fitted to be “the Mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6). There was nothing that belonged to Deity, which He did not possess, and nothing that pertained to humanity but He was clothed with (Rev 1:5-8). He had the nature of Him that was offended by sin, and of him that offended. “As sin was our invention (Ecc 7:29), so Christ alone is God’s, and therefore is He called ‘The Wisdom of God’ (1Co 1:24), which is not spoken of Him essentially as Second Person, but as Mediator, because in Him, God’s wisdom to the utmost is made manifest” (Thomas Goodwin).

5. In constituting Christ the federal Head of His people. “When God in wisdom had found a suitable Person, yet since this must be His only Son, here was a greater difficulty to be overcome: how to give Him for us” (Thomas Goodwin). To satisfy both the requirements of His justice and the abundance of His mercy, God determined that a full satisfaction should be made unto His Law, and such a satisfaction than if was thereby more honoured than if it has never been broken, or the whole race damned. In order thereto, He appointed that Christ should serve as the Surety and Substitute of His people. He must stand as their Representative and both fulfil all righteousness for them and endure the curse in their stead, so that they might be legally reckoned to have obeyed and suffered in Him. By transferring their guilt to the Surety, God both punishes sin and pardons the sinner. In the same stupendous Sacrifice, God has upheld the claims of His Law and lavished His kindness on His people. “The depths of God’s *love* are seen here, as of His wisdom before, in not sparing His own Son, but exposing Him to all the rigours of justice, which would not make the least abatement” (Thomas Goodwin).

Christ then was made the “Surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22). There could be no thought of reconciliation between a holy God and polluted rebels until sin had been put away and everlasting righteousness brought in; and as our Surety, the Lord Jesus accomplished both. But O my reader, marvel at and stand in awe before what that involved. It involved that He who was in the form of God should take upon Him the form of a Servant. The Lord of angels should be laid in a manger. That the Maker of the universe should not have where to lay His head. That He should be constantly engaged in doing good and injuring none, yet be cast out by the world and deserted by His own followers. That the Lord of glory should be condemned as a malefactor, His holy face fouled by the vile spittle of men and His back scourged by them. That the King of kings should be nailed hand and foot to a convict’s gibbet. That the Beloved of the Father should be smitten and forsaken by Him. Such contraries transcend the wit of man and could never have been invented by him. Must we not exclaim, “O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.” (Psa 92:5)!

6. In overruling sin to our gain. What a marvel of Divine wisdom is this: that God has not only removed the reproach, which the entrance of it brought upon His government, but that He made sin to be the foil for a greatest and grandest display of His perfections; and that He has not only devised a plan whereby His people are completely recovered from all the dire consequences and effects of the fall, but that they obtain a vastly superior inheritance than was the portion of unfallen Adam. God would have His people not only saved from Hell, but also brought to Heaven, yet in such a way should be most to the honour of Himself and of His Son. The apostle speaks of “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *with eternal glory*” (2Ti 2:10)—not only salvation, but a glorious one: one that is to the glory of Him who contrived it, of Him who

purchased it, of Him who applies it, and of them who enjoy it. What a truly amazing thing is this that shame should be the path to glory, that fallen sinners are enriched by the Redeemer's poverty, that those grovelling in the mire of sin should be advanced to the highest dignities by Christ's making Himself "of no reputation" (Phi 2:7)!

What honour it brings to God's wisdom not only to restore fallen men, but to make the fall issue in their superior excellence. If they had only been restored to their forfeited estate and the enjoyment of that happiness which they had lost, it had been a remarkable triumph of grace, but to make them "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17) and partakers of His glory (Joh 17:24) leaves us lost in amazement. It is a mystery of nature that the corruption of one thing is made to minister to the generation of another (as the bones of animals fertilize vegetation), but it is a grander mystery of grace that our fall in Adam should occasion a nobler restitution. Innocence was not our last end: a superior felicity awaits us on High. Human nature is raised to a far higher degree of honour than had man retained his innocency, for through redemption and regeneration, the elect are vitally united to the God-man Mediator and made members of His Body. The devil's empire is overthrown by the very same nature as he overthrew (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20)!

7. In winning rebels unto Himself. Having contemplated something of the wisdom and love of the Father, the willingness and work of the Son, here we are to behold (more distinctively) the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. When He first draws near to the elect in their unregenerate state, He finds them in a most deplorable condition: their understandings darkened by sin, their hearts filled with enmity toward God, their wills steeled against Him. Not only have they no regard for His glory, but they are without any desire for His so-great salvation, yea, positively and strongly averse to it. Here too are obstacles which need removing, obstacles so formidable that nothing short of omniscience and omnipotence could overcome the same. How shall captives be delivered who are thoroughly satisfied with their prison? How shall slaves be freed who are in love with their bonds? Particularly, how shall that be effected while treating them as rational and responsible beings, without offering violence to their wills and reducing them to mere machines?

Some may regard the above as a very exaggerated statement of the case, supposing that a complete solution is found by presenting the Gospel to them. But Scripture teaches, and experience and observation verifies it, that the natural man has no eyes capable of beholding the beauty of the Gospel, and that his heart is so desperately wicked he will not receive the Saviour that it offers him. How then are such creatures to be saved from themselves? How shall those who detest holiness be brought to desire it? the dead in sins made to walk in newness of life? That such a miracle *is* performed we know, but *how* it is wrought, we know not. Christ Himself declares it is a mystery as inscrutable to man as the workings of the wind (Joh 3:8). All we know is that life, light, love are supernaturally communicated, by which the unwilling are made willing—not by compelling them to do what they abhor, but by sweetly overcoming their aversion. "With *lovingkindness* [not by mere physical power] have I *drawn* thee" (Jer 31:3).

8. In making our holiness and happiness conserve each other. This is yet another of the marvels of God's wisdom: that He has contrived that the same Gospel, which secures our everlasting felicity, shall also promote our present purity. The sanctity of God is not compromised by His clemency of sinners, for the Redeemer is Himself both the principle and pattern of holiness unto all who are saved by Him. Moreover, the same grace to send His Son to die for us gives the Holy Spirit to renew us according to the Divine image; and thereby, make us meet for communion with Him. What a wonder of Divine wisdom to so highly exalt those who are so utterly unworthy in themselves and yet, at the same time, effectually humble them that they cry, "Not unto us O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, *and* for Thy truth's sake" (Psa 115:1)! God's lovingkindness unto His people neither loosens the bonds of duty, nor breaks that relation in which they stand to Him as their sovereign Lord and Governor. The Gospel does not permit its beneficiaries to return hatred for love, nor contempt for benefit, but lays them unto deeper obligations of gratitude to obedience. Those chosen to salvation are also "predestinate[d] to be conformed to the image of His [God's] Son" (Rom 8:29). The law of faith requires us to submit to Christ's scepter, as well as depend upon His sacrifice. —AWP