

Vol. XXII

September, 1943

No. 9

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

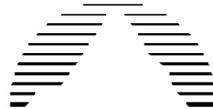
CONTENTS

The Word of His Grace.....	2
The Sermon on the Mount.....	5
<i>26f. Profession Tested: Matthew 7:24, 25</i>	
The Mission and Miracles of Elisha.....	9
<i>9. Sixth Miracle</i>	
The Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance.....	13
<i>9. Its Opposition</i>	
Dagon Destroyed.....	16

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.

Chapel Library is currently reprinting the monthly issues in sequence, mailing quarterly to subscribers in the USA as the Lord enables.



CHAPEL LIBRARY

2603 W. Wright St. • Pensacola, FL 32505
 850 438-6666 • fax: 850 438-0227
 chapel@mountzion.org • www.mountzion.org
A ministry of Mt. Zion Bible Church

THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

Various reasons may be suggested why the Scriptures should be so designated: Acts 20:32. Among them the following. *First*, it is most in accord with His gracious character that their Author should communicate with His people. In view of all that we know of His perfections it is inconceivable that God should hold Himself aloof in unbroken silence: a dumb Deity would be no more winsome than the inarticulate idols of the heathen. If a human parent writes to his sons and daughters when they are absent from home, shall our heavenly Father withhold a like proof of His love for His dear children? We are told that “it *became Him* [the Father], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10): that is to say, it accorded with His perfections and redounded to His glory that the whole plan of redemption should be as He designed it. Then may it not be said, reverently, it *became* the Triune God to give us a written revelation, that since He is in Himself “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) He should bestow upon us the Word of His grace? To make such a communication graces or adorns His character. The Psalmist declares of God “Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy name” (138:2), that is, above every other revelation of himself.

Second, yet the gift of His Word is an act of pure benignity on His part. There was nothing whatever outside of God which *required* Him to grant His creatures a written revelation. No indeed: the great I AM finds within Himself the springs of all His actions. He takes counsel with none (Rom 11:34) and gives not account of any of His matters (Job 33:13). God is exalted high above all, fulfilling His own sovereign pleasure, working all things after the counsel of His own will. He is the one absolutely Free Agent in the universe: under no restraint. All creatures are under infinite obligations unto Him, but He is obligated to none. If then He vouchsafes us a communication it proceeds from His mere condescension and magnanimity: it is an act of pure grace. It must be so, for we were not entitled to it, and could do nothing to earn or merit it; no, not in our unfallen state. The holy angels are dependent creatures, maintained in being and sustained in holiness by their Maker, and therefore it is impossible for them to do anything which brings the Most High into their debt. His Word, then, has issued not from the requirements of justice but proceeds freely from His sovereign grace.

Third, hence the gift of His Word is one of unmerited and undeserved goodwill on God’s part. If unfallen creatures are entirely incapable of bringing the Most High under any obligation to them, how much less so those who have revolted from His scepter and repudiated His government over them. What claim can rebels have upon Him whose laws they defiantly trample underfoot? To what favourable consideration are insurrectionists entitled from their Sovereign? None whatever. Their very enmity calls for His wrath and not His mercy, for sentence of judgment rather than expressions of lovingkindness. Then let amazement be rekindled in our hearts as we contemplate afresh this marvel of the Divine clemency. Be astonished O ye heavens and earth, that instead of annihilating the apostate race of Adam Jehovah was pleased to address them in overtures of grace, calling upon them to throw down the weapons of their warfare and be reconciled to Him, making known to them the way of recovery and restoration to His favour. That was indeed grace—grace “fathomless as the sea.”

Fourth, it is so denominated because it is the chief instrument employed by His Spirit. In Hebrews 10:29 we find the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of grace,” and He is so designated there in connection with His ministration and operation in the assemblies of the saints. The Word and the Spirit are so intimately conjoined that we are scarcely warranted in thinking of the one without the other. The Word does not operate without the Spirit’s agency and the Spirit works not apart from the Word. It was by the Spirit’s inspiration that the Word was first given, for “holy men of God spake moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). It is by the Spirit we are enlightened (Eph 1:17,18), yet the Word is the means He employs. It is by the Spirit we are sanctified (Rom 15:16), yet not apart from the Truth (John 17:17). It is by the Spirit we are strengthened (Eph 3:16) as He causes the Word to dwell in us richly (Col 3:16). It is by the Spirit we are comforted (Acts 9:31) as He applies the Divine promises to our hearts. How appropriate, then, that the grand Instrument employed by the Spirit of grace should be termed “the Word of His grace.”

Fifth, in His Word God has disclosed to us the wondrous “riches of His grace.” Therein is set forth the incarnate Word “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), the One who “came to seek and to save that which was lost,” the “Friend of publicans and sinners” (Luke 7:34), the One who fed the hungry, healed the sick, cleansed the leper, raised the dead. Therein is revealed the “Gospel of the grace of God” bringing “good tidings of great joy,” for it proclaims rest for the weary, pardon to the guilty, justification to the ungodly, adoption to the outcast, treasures in heaven for spiritual paupers. Its terms are “Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). Such good news is not to be confined to the cloister but freely proclaimed to “every creature.” The twentieth century needs it as urgently as did the first, and its music is just as welcome to ears opened by the Spirit of grace. It is “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” who are to be called to the feast which grace has spread (Luke 14:13).

Sixth, it is called the Word of his grace because therein we are informed how grace is to be obtained, namely, by coming as empty-handed beggars to the Mercy-seat. The dais upon which the Mediator is now seated is the Throne of Grace and Therefore are His subjects invited, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). It is written “But He giveth more grace,” and if we find ourselves straitened the fault is entirely ours and not because of any reluctance in Him to bestow. Nor is the particular fault or cause of our lack difficult to determine: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). “He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent empty away” (Luke 1:53). It is the poor in spirit, those who feel themselves to be utterly dependent upon the Divine bounty, and not the self-righteous and self-satisfied, who are enriched by the heavenly Donor.

Seventh, because it is itself the chief means of grace. It not only instructs us where grace is to be found and how further supplies of it are to be obtained, but it is the principal medium through which grace is actually imparted to the soul. As its sacred pages are reverently perused the mind is instructed, the conscience enlightened, the affections warmed, and the will moved. As its exceeding great and precious promises are meditated upon and treasured up in the heart new strength is imparted to the soul. As its holy precepts are turned into earnest prayer help is obtained for the discharge of duty. As its timely warnings and admonitions are heeded, temptations lose their power and the snares of Satan are avoided. As its cheering revelation of what God has prepared for them that love Him is received by faith, new hope is kindled in the breast and the trials of life are borne with greater fortitude. As the end of the journey is neared death loses its terrors and the call to remove hence becomes more desirable. —AWP

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

26f. Profession Tested: Matthew 7:24, 25

A pondering of Matthew 7:24-27 suggests the need of our seeking to supply answers to the following questions. First, what is the force of the opening "Therefore"? Second, who are represented by the "wise" and the "foolish" men? Third, what is denoted by the "rock" and the "sand" on which they build? Fourth, what is signified by the "house" which each one erects? Fifth, what is portrayed by the hurricane which bursts upon the "house" and tests its security? Simple as these questions are the replies returned thereto will determine the soundness or unsoundness of any exposition given to the passage. In seeking our answers recourse must also be had unto the parallel passage in Luke 6:47-49, which supplies a number of additional details. The best analysis of these verses we have met with was furnished by one of the earliest of the Puritans, W. Perkins, 1590. He focused attention on three things: the duty inculcated—obedience; the property of this duty—wisdom; the reward—security. The three parts of this wisdom lay in digging deep, in securing a rock foundation, and in building thereon.

First, the force of the opening "Therefore." In addition to the more general remarks made thereon in the previous article let us now point out that, Christ was here drawing a plain but searching conclusion from His solemn statement in vv. 21-23. There He had declared that, Not every one who renders lip-service to His Lordship shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only he that does the will of the Father as made known by the Son; yea, that the many who substitute preaching and performing wonderful works for actual obedience to His commands, He will yet say unto such "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." Then He at once added, "*Therefore* whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." Is not the connection, then, between the two passages unmistakably indicated? Is not our Lord's design and meaning in the verses now before us crystal clear? In vv. 21-23 Christ is viewed in His office of Judge, testing professors, making known unto us who it is that will survive the fiery trial of that dread Day; and in vv. 24-27 He reveals the path which must be trod if that Day is to be wisely and successfully anticipated.

In the Day of testing not what we have said, but what we have *done* in obedience to the Divine will, shall alone be accepted as evidence: not the profession we have made, but the verification we have given of it in our Christian walk; not the doctrines we believed, but the fruits they bore in our daily lives. It will be useless to plead that we possessed extraordinary gifts and employed them in "Christian service," that we were leaders in the churches and did much in the name of Christ, if we wore not His yoke and followed not the example He has left us. Real practical godliness is the only thing which will be approved in that Day. Personal holiness is little esteemed here, but it will be everything there (Heb 12:14). In that Day the Judge of all the earth will "give to every man according as his *work* shall be" (Rev 22:12). Therefore the man who acts wisely now is the one who makes conscience of the commandments of Christ, who regulates his conduct by them; conversely, the one who disregards the revealed will of God and follows a course of self-pleasing, no matter what garb of religion he wears, is playing the part of the fool, as he will yet discover to his eternal undoing.

The answer to our *second* question has largely been anticipated in what we wrote in the preceding article. The "wise" man is the one who "heareth these sayings" of Christ, who "cometh to" Him (Luke 6:47), which involves turning his back upon the world and forsaking the service of Satan, and who "doeth them." "These sayings of Mine" is emphatic, having particular reference to the principles Christ had enunciated and the precepts He had inculcated in the previous sections of this Sermon on the mount. We have to go unto other parts of the NT to learn Christian *doctrine*, but here we have described Christian *practice*. Some, like Tolstoi, have magnified this Sermon to the disparagement of the Epistles; others, like the Dispensationalists, have exalted the Epistles above the Sermon: the one is as reprehensible as the other. One part of Scripture must not be pitted against another part. Both this Sermon and the Epistles are essential parts of the revealed will of God. "Who have, in every age, uprightly and unreservedly, obeyed these sayings of our Lord, except they who have firmly believed the doctrines of the Gospel as more clearly and fully revealed in the apostolic epistles?" (T. Scott).

The "wise" man, then, is the one who cometh to Christ, heareth His instructions and doeth them. To *do* that which He has commanded includes, first, a believing of them, that is, a definite appropriation of His precepts, a taking of them home to myself. It involves an understanding of them, and that calls for humility and meekness of mind rather than keenness of intellect, a meditating upon Christ's words and a crying unto Him "that which I see not teach Thou me." It involves a making conscience of them, the realization these sayings of Christ contain not only good counsel which it is my wisdom to heed, but that they are His imperative requirements which I disregard at my peril. It involves an actual putting of them into practice so that I abstain from those things which He forbids and perform those duties which He specifies: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). "All the sayings of Christ: not only the laws He has enacted, but the truths He has revealed must be done by us. They are a light not only unto our eyes, but to our feet, and are designed to not only *inform* our judgments but to *reform* our hearts and lives" (Matt. Henry).

We regard the word "doth" as the all-important one in our present passage, and care needs to be taken lest we improperly limit its meaning. To "do" our Lord's sayings includes very much more than the mere outward performance of those actions which He requires. Our whole inner and outer man must be conformed to them; our character must be moulded by them, our affections must be regulated, our wills governed, and our habits of thought dominated by them, as well as our actions being in accord with them. The Word of Christ must "dwell in" us, and that "richly" (Col 3:16), and that calls for a definite process of spiritual horticulture. We must "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness" if we are to "receive with meekness the ingrafted Word which is able to save our souls" (James 1:21). Note well that expression "the *ingrafted* Word": that which is addressed to us must be rooted in us, planted in the soul, drawing all the sap of the stock to itself—"all that is within us" serving the Word. Thereby we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind" (Rom 12:2). This, and nothing short of this, is what constitutes a genuine "conversion."

From what has been said above it will appear how intimately related are the several answers unto those questions we formulated in the opening paragraph, how that they necessarily grow naturally out of each other. Cannot the reader now decide for himself what is denoted by this "rock" on which our Lord represents the wise man as building his house? Bearing in mind the scope of our passage and its relation to the context, does not the first half of v. 24 furnish a decisive index to the meaning of the second half? It is "these sayings" of Christ, understood, believed and obeyed, which is the "rock" here. "These sayings are the dictates of eternal truth and righteousness, and the everlasting mountains shall be sooner rooted up than any one of these shall be falsified. This is the foundation on which the wise builder places his edifice: not his own conjectures or reasonings, nor the arguments and reasonings of other men, but the 'true and faithful sayings of God'" (J. Brown)—to which may be added, and not following the carnal desires of our own hearts. If the reader still insists that the "rock" here is Christ Himself, we reply, If so, Christ considered as Prophet and not as Priest, as Lord, and not as Saviour, as *Teacher* and not Redeemer.

There should be little difficulty in determining *what* is signified by the "house" which the builder erects upon the "rock" or "sayings" of Christ, though a certain latitude should be allowed as to *how* it be stated. The principle definitions made by the best of the expositors are: the *profession* he makes, the *character* that is formed, the *hope* which is cherished. When analysed these three expressions or things differ little in essence. The profession made is only valid if it be verified by a character which is formed by the whole range of Christ's teaching in this Sermon, a character which is displayed by conduct in accordance therewith. So too the hope cherished by the believer, the assurance he possesses, that God has accepted him in the Beloved, is but presumption, a mere carnal confidence, unless it be grounded upon this "rock," that is, unless the one claiming such a hope be possessed of that character which alone warrants the expectation of everlasting bliss. Furthermore, the cherishings of a good hope, the possession of a peaceful assurance that I am a child of God, is an essential part of a character which is formed by an appropriation and assimilation of the "sayings" of Christ.

This figure of the building of a house to represent the formation of a Christian's character under the teaching of Christ is employed frequently in the Acts and Epistles. When taking leave of the elders of Ephesus Paul commended them to God and the Word of his grace "which is able to *build you up*" (Acts 20:32). The Colossian saints were exhorted "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him" (2:7,8); while Jude bade the saints be "building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (v 20). The same word here rendered "built" is also translated "edify." Thus, "Follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom 14:19); "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Rom 15:2). "Let no corrupt communica-

tion proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying" (Eph 4:29). "Wherefore comfort [or "exhort"] yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess 5:11). Timothy was instructed "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith" (1 Thess 1:4). How careful we should be in our converse with each other that what we say be of a spiritually constructive character and not destructive.

The "house," then, may be taken first for the profession made, which is yet to be put to the proof in the day of testing. Or more definitely it represents the character of the one making a Christian profession; and by "character" we include the whole frame of his beliefs, sentiments, affections, and active habits. Having by the faith of the Truth found the only sure foundation, he erects on it an edifice of thoughts, feelings and volitions. He is moulded according to "that form of doctrine whereto he was delivered" (Rom 6:17). He is not regulated by his own carnal desires, nor the opinions and examples of his fellows, but by the sure and authoritative precepts of Christ. Accordingly he cherishes a "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2) and it is "a good hope through grace" (2 Thess 2:16), for it is based upon a reliable foundation, grounded on the precepts and promises of the Lord; which precepts have been laid hold of and translated into practice, and which promises have been mixed with faith and made our own. Such a hope will prove both "sure and steadfast" in the hour of testing.

From all that has been before us on the different points it will be seen that everything goes back to and turns upon the word "doeth": *that* strikes the keynote of the verse, and therefore its dominant theme is, our practical compliance with the Divine will. The importance which God attaches to and the value which He places upon *obedience* comes out plainly in the words of His prophet, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22). To keep strictly to the path of the Divine commandments is more pleasing unto God than any of the outward forms of religion or the most liberal contributions to His earthly cause. Well did T. Scott point out with regard to the Levitical sacrifices, "their value was entirely from the appointment of God, and they were not acceptable except offered in obedience to Him, and with a penitent, believing and pious mind. When therefore they were substituted in the place of true piety or trusted in as meritorious; when the means were used to compensate for the neglect of the end, they became an abomination, however costly and numerous they were." So now.

The same insistent emphasis upon obedience was made by Christ. When interrupted in His talking to the people by one who informed Him that His mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him, He made answer by stretching forth His hand "toward His disciples" and saying, "Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall *do* the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:46-50). It was as though He said, those that are nearest and dearest to Me, spiritually speaking, are My "disciples," and they are described as the ones who *comply with* the Divine will. Again; when a certain woman said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked," He replied "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27,28). The ones on whom the benediction of God rests are they who *keep* His Word—in their hearts, as their most precious possession; in their minds, by frequent meditation; in their lives, as the rule of practice.

Conscientious souls are likely to be troubled at this point, sensible that their obedience is so imperfect and faulty. It remains therefore that we should endeavour to set their fears at rest and attempt to show more definitely what Christ did *not* signify and what He *did* imply by "whoso heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them." Our Lord did not mean that His disciples perpetually and flawlessly perform His precepts, for He neither removes from them the carnal nature at their regeneration, nor does He grant them such a measure of his grace in this world as to enable them to render a sinless obedience. God could have done both had He thought well, but it has pleased Him to exalt imputed righteousness rather than inherent in this life. Not only does every saint fail to render that obedience which is required by God's Law as a whole, but he does not obey any single commandment perfectly, for every duty we perform, yea, our highest act of worship, is marred by sin. In the most holy men corruption deprives them of the purity that ought to be there, and lusts fight against the perfect holiness they desire and strive after (Rom 7:18-21; Gal 5:17).

Christians perform the sayings of Christ *sincerely* though not perfectly, in spirit and in truth, though not in the letter and full execution. When Christ said to the Father of His apostles, "They *have kept* Thy Word" (John 17:6), He did not mean they had done so as flawlessly and excellently as He had Himself done. And when we read "hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3), consistency requires us to understand it that, as we only "know Him" in part in this life (1 Cor 13:12) so we only "keep His commandments" *in part*. Where there is a *genuine willingness* (Rom 7:18; Heb 13:18; 1 Tim 6:18), God accepts it for the deed (2 Cor 8:12). Because His people have His Law written in their hearts (Heb 10:16), because they delight in it with their inner man (Rom 7:22), because they truly de-

sire to obey it fully (Psa 119:5), and pray earnestly to that end (Psa 119:35), and repent of and confess their disobedience (Psa 32:5), God is pleased—according to the terms of the Covenant of Grace, and for Christ’s sake—to accept their imperfect obedience and account it as a keeping of His Law.

To prevent wrong conclusions being drawn from the last paragraph two things need to be pointed out. *First*, it must *not* be inferred that God has lowered His standard in order to meet our infirmities: that standard is par excellence and shall never be altered. But the Surety of God’s people fully conformed to it and His perfect obedience is reckoned to the account of those who savingly believe on Him, so that imputatively they are flawlessly righteous in the sight of the Law. Inherently they are righteous in the sense that they fully approve of the Law, delight in it, and sincerely set themselves to an unreserved obedience of the whole of it; and thus “the righteousness of the Law *is* fulfilled *in* them” (Rom 8:4). Yet because of their remaining depravity they fail to realize their desires (Phil 3:12), mourn over and confess their sinful failures, and are forgiven for Christ’s sake. In this life they are more active in seeking from God the remission of their failures than they are in offering to Him that which is faultless. Some of the old writers were wont to say, the present perfection of a Christian consists in a penitential acknowledgement of his imperfection.

Second, the nature and scope of this sincere but imperfect obedience needs to be amplified and honestly stated.

1. The Christian’s compliance with “these sayings” of the Lord *is internal and spiritual* as well as external. If any man should respond to every positive and negative precept of Christ in his outward conduct and yet his inner man be not affected and influenced by them, it would be like a body minus a soul—a corpse. As some one has aptly expressed it; obedience of soul is the soul of obedience. It is at this point, especially, the righteousness of the saint exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, for while they rested wholly on their outward obedience of the Law, within they were full of unmortified lusts. The Law is “spiritual” (Rom 7:14) and requires spiritual compliance thereto. The only worship God will accept is that which is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Nevertheless, our obedience is not to consist solely of spiritual meditation and contemplating the mortification of our lusts and the cultivation of our graces: there must be an external walking in the Truth also.

2. Sincere obedience *is impartial*, extending to the whole Law as it is explained in the precepts and exhortations of both the OT and the New. To affect much devotion unto the things pertaining to God and then evince an utter lack of conscience and equity in things pertaining to man, is horrible hypocrisy. The pharisees were notorious in this: they made long prayers, yet devoured widows houses; they fasted twice a week, yet laid burdens on their disciples grievous to be borne; they tithed, yet taught that neither father nor mother was to be relieved if men had placed their substance under a vow to God. O my reader, thy attendance at “early morning communion” or “the breaking of bread” is a vile mockery if you are unscrupulous and grasping in your dealings with men. Your psalm singing and lauding of the person and perfections of Christ is a stench in God’s nostrils if you lie and thieve. On the other hand, however honest and truthful with your fellows, if you rob God of the submission, devotion and praise which are His due, your heart is rotten. Of the parents of the Baptist it is written, “They were both righteous before God, walking in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6).

3. Sincere obedience *is universal*, by which we mean, it includes the things to be *believed* as well as practiced, and hence it is termed “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). God’s commandments must not be limited to the prohibition of wickedness, but extended also to false doctrines. If the Epistles be read attentively it will be found that the apostles were as emphatic and stern in their denunciation of teachers of error as of lascivious livers, and that they pressed the necessity of a sound and holy faith as vehemently as they did a good and pure conscience. A sincere heart is set against heresies as definitely and diligently as against sinful conduct, and sinful conduct as heresies. One who is opposed to ungodliness but indifferent about false doctrines, may justly suspect the soundness of his heart; while one who denounces false doctrine but tolerates wickedness in himself or his family has serious reason to question the validity of his profession. Christians are given no more licence in matters of faith than of deportment. Stubborn heretics are to be cast out of the church equally with the openly immoral.

This article is already long enough, so we must postpone our answer to the fifth question—What is portrayed by the hurricane which bursts upon the “house” and tests its security?—till we consider (D.V.) v. 27. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

9. Sixth Miracle

First, we shall take notice of *its connection*. Our present narrative opens with the word “And” which intimates that the incident described here is closely related to what was before us in our last, though we must not conclude that this by any means exhausts its force. Sometimes the Spirit of God has placed two things in juxtaposition for the purpose of comparison, that we may observe the resemblances between them; at other times, it is with the object of pointing a contrast, that we may consider the points of dissimilarity. Here it is the latter: note the following antitheses. In the former case the woman’s place of residence is not given (v 1), but here it is (v 8). The one was a widow (v 1), this woman’s husband was alive (v 9). The former was financially destitute, this one was a woman of means. The one sought out Elisha, the prophet approached the other. Elisha provided for the former, this one ministered unto him. The widow had “two sons,” whereas the married woman was childless. The one was put to a severe test (vv 3,4), the other was not.

Second, a word on *its location*. The place where this miracle was wrought cannot be without significance, for there is nothing meaningless in Holy Writ, though in this instance we confess to having little or no light. The one who was the beneficiary of this miracle resided at Shunem, which appears to mean “uneven.” This place is mentioned only twice elsewhere in the OT. First, in Joshua 19:18 from which we learn that it was situated in the territory allotted to the tribe of Issachar. Second, in 1 Samuel 28:4, where we are told it was the place that the Philistines gathered themselves together and pitched in battle array against Israel, on which occasion Saul was so terrified that, after inquiring in vain of the Lord, he sought unto the witch of Endor. Matthew Henry tells us that “Shunem lay in the road between Samaria and Carmel, a road which Elisha was accustomed to travel, as we gather from 2:25.” It seems to have been a farming district, and in this pastoral setting a lovely domestic scene is laid.

Third, its beneficiary. “And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman” (2 Kings 4:8). The Hebrew word (“gadol”) is used in very varied connections. In Genesis 1:16, 21 and many other passages it refers to material or physical greatness. In Exodus 32:21, “great sin,” it has a moral force. In 2 Kings 5:1, Job 1:3, Proverbs 25:6 it is associated with social eminence. In Psalm 48:1 and numerous other places it is predicated of the Lord Himself. This woman was one of substance or wealth, as is intimated by the servants her husband had and their building and furnishing a room for the prophet. God has “His own” even among the rich and noble. This woman was also “great” spiritually. She was great in hospitality, in discernment—perceiving that Elisha was “a holy man of God,” in meekness—by owning her husband’s headship, in thoughtfulness for others—the care she took in providing for the prophet’s comfort, in contentedness (v 13), in wisdom—realising Elisha would desire retirement and quietness; and, as we shall see, in faith—confidently counting upon God to show Himself strong on her behalf and work a further miracle.

“And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread.” Elisha seems to have resided at or near mount Carmel (2:25; 4:25): but went his circuit through the land to visit the seminaries of the prophets and to instruct the people, which probably was his stated employment when not sent on some special service. At Shunem there lived a woman of wealth and piety, who invited him to come to her house, and with some difficulty prevailed” (Thos. Scott). Several practical points are suggested by this. The minister of the Gospel should not be forward in pressing himself upon people, but should wait until he is invited to partake of their hospitality, least of all should he deliberately court the intimacy of the “great,” except it be with the object of doing them good. “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate” (Rom 12:16) is one of the rules God has given His people to walk by, and His servant should set them an example in the matter.

The Lord’s servants, like those to whom they minister, have their ups and downs, not only in their inward experience but also in external circumstances. Yes, they have their “ups” as well as their “downs.” They are not required to spend all their days in caves or sojourning by brooks. If there are those who oppose, God also raises up others to befriend them. Was it not thus with our blessed Lord when He tabernacled here? Though for the most part He “had not where to lay His head,” yet there were many women who “ministered unto Him of their substance” (Luke 8:2,3), and the home at Bethany welcomed

Him. So with the apostle Paul: though made as the offscouring of all things to the Jewish nation, yet the saints loved and esteemed him highly for his work's sake. If he was cast into prison, yet he also makes mention of "Gaius mine host" (Rom 16:23). It has ever been thus. The experience of Elisha was no exception, as the present writer can testify, for in his extensive journeyings the Lord opened the hearts and homes of many of His people unto him.

"Given to hospitality" (Rom 12:13) is required of the saints, and of God's servants too (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8), and that "without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9), and this held good equally under the OT era. It is to be noted that this woman took the initiative, for she did not wait until asked by Elisha or one of his friends. From the words "as often as he passed by" we gather that she was on the look-out for him. She sought occasion to do good and bought up her opportunities. Nor was her hospitality any formal things, but earnest and warm-hearted. Hence it may strike us as all the more strange that the prophet demurred and that she had to constrain him to enter her home. This intimates that the servant of God should not readily respond to every invitation received, especially from the wealthy: "seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jer 45:5) is to regulate his conduct. Elisha responded to her importunity and after becoming better acquainted with her, never failed to partake of her kindness whenever he passed that way.

"And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither" (vv 9,10). Herein we have manifest several other features of her moral greatness. Apparently she was the owner of this property, for her husband is not termed a "great man," yet we find her conferring with him and seeking his permission. Thereby she took her proper place and left her sisters an admirable example. The husband is "the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church," and therefore the command is "wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph 5:22,23). Instead of taking matters into her own hands and acting independently, this "great woman" sought her husband's consent and cooperation. How much domestic strife would be avoided if there was more of this mutual conferring.

This great woman was endowed with spiritual discernment, for she perceived that Elisha was a holy man of God. The two things are not to be separated: it is those who walk in subjection to the revealed will of God who are granted spiritual perception: "he that is spiritual discerneth all things" (1 Cor 2:15) and the spiritual person is the one who is regulated by the precepts of Holy Writ, who is humble and meek and takes the place which the Lord has appointed. "If therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt 6:22): it is acting in self-will which beclouds the vision. "I understand more than the ancients," said David. And why so? "Because I keep Thy precepts" (Psa 119:100). It is when we forsake the path of obedience that our judgment is clouded and our perception dimmed.

While admiring the virtues and graces of this woman, we must not overlook the tribute she paid unto Elisha. Observe how she refers to him. Not as a "charming" or "nice man": how incongruous such an appellation for a servant of God! No, it was not any such carnal or sentimental term she employed. Nor did she allude to him as a "learned man," for scholarship and spirituality by no means always go together. Rather as "a *holy* man of God" did she designate the prophet. What a description! what a searching word for every minister of the Gospel to take to heart. It is "holy men of God" who are used by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). And how did she perceive the prophet's holiness? Perhaps by finding him at prayer, or reading the Scriptures. Certainly from the heavenliness of his conversation and general demeanour. Ah, my reader, the servant of God should need no distinctive manner of dress in order for people to identify him: his walk, his speech, his deportment ought to be sufficient.

Returning to the "great woman" let us next take note of her *constancy*. The inviting of Elisha into her home was actuated by no fleeting mood of kindness, which came suddenly upon her and as suddenly disappeared, but rather was a steady and permanent thing. Some are mere creatures of impulse. But the conduct of those is stable who act on principle. How often a church is elated when a minister is installed, and its members cannot do too much to express their appreciation for him; but how soon such enthusiasm often cools off. The best are spasmodic if not fickle, and need to bear in mind the injunction "let us not be weary in well doing" (Gal 6:9). It is blessed to see this woman did not tire of ministering to God's servant but continued to provide for his need and comfort, and at considerable trouble and expense.

Fourth, we turn now to *the occasion* of this miracle. "And it fell on a day that he came thither and turned into the chamber and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him" (vv 12,13). Elisha did not complacently accept the loving hospitality which had been shown him as a matter of course, as though it were something which was due him by

virtue of his office. No, he was truly grateful and anxious to show his appreciation. In this he differed from some ministers we have met, who appeared to think they were fully entitled to such kindness and deference. While resting from his journey, instead of congratulating himself on his “good fortune,” he thought upon his benefactress and wondered how best he could make some return. But how? She was in no financial need: apparently she lacked none of the good things of this life—what then should be done for her? He was at a loss to know: but instead of dismissing the thought, he decided to interrogate her directly.

Fifth, its peculiarity. “And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care, what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people” (v 13). This miracle differed from most of those we have previously considered in that it was *unsought*; proposed by the prophet himself. He suggested that royal honours might be bestowed on herself or husband if she so desired. “Elisha had no doubt acquired considerable influence with Jehoram and his captains by the signs deliverance and victory obtained for him (3:4-27), and though he would ask nothing for himself, he was willing to show his gratitude on behalf of his kind hostess by interposing on her behalf, if she had any petition to present” (Thos. Scott). Yet we feel that the prophet knew her too well to imagine her head was set upon such trifles as earthly dignities, and that he gave her this opportunity to declare herself more plainly.

“And she answered, I dwell among mine own people” (v 13). It looks as though the prophet’s offer to speak unto the king for her, intimated that positions of honour could be procured for her and her husband in the royal household. Her reply seems to show this, for it signified, I am quite satisfied with the portion God has given me: I desire no change or improvement in it. How very rare is such *contentment*! She was indeed a “great woman.” Alas that today there are so few like her. As Matthew Henry points out “It would be well with many, if they did but know when they are well off.” But they do not. A roving spirit takes possession of them, and they suppose they can improve their lot by moving from one place to another, only to find as the old adage says, “A rolling stone gathers no moss.” “The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest” (Isa 57:20), but it should be far otherwise with the people of God. It is much to be thankful for when we can contentedly say, “I dwell among mine own people.”

Sixth, its nature. “And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her” (v 14-17). Observe the prophet’s humility: in his perplexity he did not disdain to confer with his servant. He was no pleased to use his interests in the Court of heaven, which was far better than seeking a favour from Jehoram. It should be remembered that in OT times the giving of a son to those who had long been childless was a special mark of God’s favour and power, as the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Manoah, and Elkanah go to show. We are not sure whether her language was that of unbelief or of overwhelming astonishment; but having received a prophet in the name of a prophet she received “a prophet’s reward” (Matt 10:41).

Seventh, its meaning. This may be gathered from the miracle preceding. There we had before us a typical picture of redemption, a setting free from the exactions of the Law, a deliverance from bondage. What then is the sequel of this? Surely that which we find in the lives of the redeemed, namely, their bringing forth *fruit* unto God. This order of cause and effect is taught us in “being made free from sin...ye have your fruit unto holiness” (Rom 6:22 and cf. 1 Cor 6:20). But it is not the products of the old nature transformed, for the “flesh” remains the same unto the end, bringing forth after its own evil kind. No, it is altogether supernatural, the “fruit of the spirit,” the manifestation of the graces of the new nature communicated by God at the new birth. Accordingly we have here the fruit of the womb, yet not by the ordinary workings of nature, but, as in the case of John the Baptist (Luke 1:7,57), that which transcends nature, which issues only from the wonder-working power of God.

It is to be carefully noted in this connection that the beneficiary of our miracle is designated a “great woman.” As we have pointed out in a previous paragraph, this appellation denotes, more immediately, that she was one upon whom Divine providence had smiled, furnishing her liberally with the things of this life. But she was also morally and spiritually “great.” In both respects she was an appropriate figure of that aspect of salvation which is here before us. Redemption finds its object, like the widow of the foregoing miracle, in distress—poor, sued by the Law, unable to meet its demands. But redemption does not leave its beneficiaries thus. No, God deals with them according to “the riches of His grace” and they can now say “He hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father” (Rev 1:6). The righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, and they are “great” indeed in the eyes of God—“the excellent, in whom is all My de-

light" (Psa 16:3) is how He speaks of them. Such are the ones in whom and by whom the fruits of redemption are brought forth.

Everything recorded of this woman indicates that she was one of the Lord's redeemed. She honoured and ministered unto one of His servants, in a day when they were far from being popular. Moreover, Elisha accepted her hospitality, which he surely had not done unless he discerned in her the marks of grace. The very fact that at first she had to "constrain" him to partake of her kindness—the margin renders it "laid hold of him"—indicates he would not readily receive favours from anybody and everybody. But having satisfied himself of her spirituality, "as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread." Let it be remarked that that expression to "eat bread" means far more to an Oriental than to us. It signifies an act of communion, denoting there is a bond of fellowship between those who eat a meal together. Thus by such intimacy of communion with the prophet this woman gave further evidence of being one of God's redeemed.

As the procuring of our redemption required miracles (the Divine incarnation, the death of the God-man, His resurrection), so the application of it unto its beneficiaries cannot be without supernatural operations, both before and after. Redemption is received by faith, but before saving faith can be exercised the soul must be quickened, for one who is dead unto God cannot move toward Him. The same is true of our conversion, which is a right about-face, the soul turning from the world unto God, which is morally impossible until a miracle of grace has been wrought upon us: "turn Thou me, and I shall be turned" (Jer 31:18). Such a miracle as regeneration and conversion, whereby the soul enters into the redemption purchased by Christ, is necessarily followed by one which shows forth the miraculous *fruits* of redemption. Such is the case here, as we see in the child bestowed upon the great woman. Remarkably enough that gift came to her unsought and unexpected. And is it not thus in the experience of the Christian? When he came to Christ as a sin-burdened soul, redemption was all that he thought about: there was no asking for or anticipation of subsequent fruit. —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

9. Its Opposition

It has been shown at length in earlier articles that the concept of a total and final apostasy of a regenerated soul is not according to Truth. To postulate the eternal destruction of one to whom Divine grace has been savingly communicated to the soul is contrary to the whole tenor of the Covenant of redemption, to the attributes of God engaged in it, to the design and work of the Redeemer in it, to the Spirit's mission and His abiding with God's children "forever" (John 14:16). One who is indwelt by the Triune God shall not and cannot so fall from holiness and serve sin as to give himself wholly to its behests. One who has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son shall never again become the willing subject of Satan. One who has been made the recipient of a supernatural experience of the Truth shall never be fatally deceived by the Devil's lies. True, his will is mutable, but God's promise is unchangeable; his own strength is feeble, but God's power is invincible; his prayers are weak, but Christ's intercession is prevalent.

Yet in all ages this doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints has been opposed and denied. Satan himself believed in the apostasy of Job and had the effrontery to avow it unto Jehovah (Job 1:8-11). We need not be surprised then to find that the supreme imposture of the religious realm repudiates most vehemently this precious truth and pronounces accursed all who hold it. The merit-mongers of Rome are inveterately opposed to everything which exalts free grace. Moreover, they who so hotly deny unconditional election, particular redemption, and effectual calling, must, in order to be consistent, deny the eternal security of the Christian. Since Papists are such rabid sticklers for the "free will" of fallen man, logically, they must deny the indefectibility of all who are in Christ. If I have by an act of my own volition brought myself into a state of grace, then it clearly follows that I am capable of forsaking the same. If the "free will" of the sinner first inclines him to exercise repentance and faith, then obviously he may relapse into a state of confirmed impenitence and unbelief.

But Rome has by no means stood alone in antagonizing this blessed article of the Faith. Others who differ widely from her in many other respects have made common cause with her in this. Considerable sections of "Protestantism," whole denominations which claim to take the Word of God for their *sole* Rule of faith and practice, have also strenuously and bitterly fought against those who maintained this truth. These are what are known as Arminians, for James Arminius or Van Harmin, a Dutchman of the sixteenth century, was the first man of any prominence in orthodox circles who opposed the theology taught by John Calvin—opposed it covertly and slyly and contrary to the most solemn and particular promise and pledge which he gave to the Classis before he was installed as professor of divinity at Leyden in 1602. Since then, for the purpose of theological classification, non-Calvinists and anti-Calvinists have been termed "Arminians." The one man who did more than any other to popularize and spread Arminianism in the English-speaking world was John Wesley.

We shall now make it our business to examine the attacks which Arminians have made upon this truth of the final perseverance of the saints and the leading arguments they employ to prejudice and overturn it. But let us say at the outset, it is not because we entertain any hope of delivering such people from their errors that we are now writing, still less that we are prepared to enter the lists against them. No, it is useless to argue with those whose hearts are set against the Truth: convince a man against his will and he is of the same opinion still. Moreover God's eternal Truth is infinitely too sacred to be made the matter of carnal debate and wrangling. Rather is it our design to help those of God's people who have been harassed by the dogs who yapped at their heels and show that their bark is worse than their bite. We write now with the object of delivering the "babes" from being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11:3).

1. By misrepresenting and misstating the truth for which we contend.

It is a favourite device of Arminians to set up a "man of straw" and because *he* is incapable of withstanding their assaults, pretend they have overthrown the Calvinistic tenet itself. To caricature a doctrine and then hold up that caricature to ridicule, to falsify a doctrine and then denounce that falsification as a

thing of evil, is tantamount to acknowledging that they are unable to overthrow the doctrine as it is held and presented by its friends. Yet this is the very practice of which Arminian dialecticians are guilty. They select a single part of our doctrine and then take it up as though it were the whole. They sever the means from the end and claim we teach that the end will be reached irrespective of the means. They ignore the safeguards by which God has hedged around this part of His Truth, and which His true servants have ever maintained, and then affirm that such a doctrine is injurious, dangerous, inimical to the promotion of practical godliness. In plain language, they seek to terrify the simple by a bogey of their own manufacture.

That we have not brought an unjust and unfair charge against Arminians will appear from the following citation. "The common doctrine that perseverance requireth and commandeth all saints or believers to be fully persuaded, and this with the greatest and most indubitable certainty of faith, that there is an absolute and utter impossibility either of a total or a final defection of their faith: that though they shall fall into ten thousand enormities and most abominable sins and lie wallowing in them like a swine in the mire, yet they should remain all the while in an estate of grace, and that God will by a strong hand of irresistible grace bring them off from their sins by repentance before they die." Those were the words of one of the most influential of English Arminians in the palmy days of the Puritans, issuing from the pen of one, John Goodwin, a nephew of the pious and eminent expositor, Thomas Goodwin. In the light of what we have written in previous articles of this series few of our readers should have much difficulty in perceiving the sophistry of this miserable shift.

No well-instructed scribe of Christ ever set forth the doctrine of the saints perseverance in any such distorted manner and extravagant terms as the above, yet such is a fair sample of the devices employed by Arminians when engaged in assailing this truth: they detach a single element of it and then render repugnant their one-sided misrepresentation of the whole. The perseverance which we contend for, and which the operations of Divine grace effectually provide for and secure, is a perseverance of *faith and holiness*, —a continuing steadfast in believing and in bringing forth all the fruits of righteousness. Whereas as any one can see at a glance, the travesty presented in the above quotation is a preservation in spite of and in the midst of perseverance *in wickedness*. To speak about falling "into ten thousand enormities and most abominable sins and lie wallowing in them like a swine in the mire (i.e. quite at home in such filth and content therewith), and yet they shall remain all the while in an estate of grace" is a palpable contradiction of terms, for an "estate of grace" is one of subjection and obedience to God.

Again, Goodwin makes out the Calvinist to say in God's name, "You that truly believe in My Son, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are fully persuaded and assured from My will and command given unto you in that behalf, yea, according to the infallible Word of Truth you have from Me, that you cannot possibly, no, not by the most horrid sins and abominable practices, that you shall or can commit, fall away either totally or finally from your faith; for in the midst of your foulest actings and courses there remains a seed in you which is sufficient to make you true believers, and to preserve you from falling away finally, that it is impossible you should die in your sins; you that know and are assured that I will by an irresistible hand work perseverance in you, and consequently that you are out of all danger of condemnation, and that heaven and salvation belong unto you, and are as good as yours already, so that nothing but giving of thanks appertains to you."

The incongruity of such a fiction should at once be apparent. First, as true saints do not have a firm and comfortable assurance of their perseverance many of them are frequently beset by doubts and fears. Second, it is by means of God's promises and precepts, exhortations and threatenings, that they are stirred up to the use of those things by which perseverance is wrought and assurance is obtained. Third, no rightly-taught saint ever expected his perseverance or the least assurance of it under such a foul supposition as falling into and continuing in "horrid sins and abominable practices." Fourth, the promises of eternal security are made to those in whose mind God writes His laws and in whose hearts He places His holy fear, so that they shall not depart from Him: they are made to those who "hear" the voice of the good Shepherd and who "follow" the example He has left them. Fifth, so far from "nothing but giving of thanks" appertaining to them, they are bidden to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, to run with patience the race set before them, to make their calling and election sure by adding to their graces and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

Let us say once more, and it cannot be insisted upon too frequently and emphatically in this degenerate age, that the perseverance of saints which is depicted in Holy Writ is not a simple continuance of Christians on this earth for a number of years after regeneration and faith have been wrought in them and then their being admitted as a matter of course to Heaven, *without* any regard to their moral history in the intervening period. No, though *that* may be how incompetent novices have portrayed it, and how Antinomians have

perverted it, yet such a concept is as far removed from the reality as darkness is from light. The perseverance of the saints is a steady pressing forward in the course on which they entered at conversion—an enduring unto the end in the exercise of faith and in the practice of holiness. The perseverance of the saints consists in a continuing to deny self, to mortify the lusts of the flesh, to resist the Devil, to fight the good fight of faith; and though they suffer many falls by the way, and receive numerous wounds from their foes, yet, if “faint,” they “hold on their way.”

2. *By insisting that this doctrine encourages loose living.*

We have heard numbers of Arminians declare “If I were absolutely sure that Heaven would be my everlasting portion, then I would drop all religion and take my fill of the world,” to which we replied, Perhaps *you* would, but the regenerate feel quite different: they find their delight in One who is infinitely preferable to all that can be found in this perishing world. Yet Arminians never tire of saying that this article of the non-apostasy of the saints is a vicious and dangerous one, affording great encouragement unto those who believe themselves to be Christians to indulge themselves in iniquities, such as Lot, David, Solomon and Peter committed. It is granted that those who commit such sins and die without repentance for them and faith in the blood of the Lamb have no inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ. It is also a fact that God visited the transgressions of those men with His rod and recovered them from their falls. Nor are such instances recorded in the Word to encourage us in sin, but rather to caution us against and make us distrustful of ourselves.

Such a gross view as is propounded in the above objection loses sight entirely of the nature of regeneration, tacitly denying that the new birth is a miracle of grace, effecting a radical change within, renewing the faculties of the soul, giving an entirely different bent to a person’s inclinations. To talk of a child of God falling in love again with sin is tantamount to suggesting that there is no real difference between one who has passed from death unto life, who has had the principle of holiness communicated to him, who is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and those who are unregenerate. That one who has been merely intellectually impressed and emotionally stirred to temporarily reform his outward conduct may indeed return to his former manner of life, is readily conceded; but that one who has experienced a supernatural work of grace within, who has been made “a new creature in Christ Jesus,” can or will lose all relish for spiritual things and becomes satisfied with the husks which the swine feed on, we emphatically deny.

3. *By asserting our doctrine deprives God’s people of the sharpest bit which He has given for curtailng the flesh in them.*

It is affirmed by many Arminians that the most effectual means for restraining their evil inclinations, alike in the regenerate and the unregenerate, is the fear of the everlasting burnings, and from this premise they draw the conclusion that when a person is definitely assured he has been once and for all delivered from the wrath to come, the strongest deterrent against carnality and lasciviousness has been taken from him. There would be considerable force in this objection if God had not communicated to His children that which operates in them more mightily and effectually than the dread of punishment, and since He *has*, then the argument has little point or weight to it. Whatever influence the fear of Hell exerts in curtailng the lusts of the flesh, certain it is that the righteous are withheld from a life of sin by far more potent considerations. Faith purifieth the heart (Acts 15:9), faith overcometh the world (1 John 5:4) but Scripture nowhere ascribes such virtues to a dread of the Lake of fire. An unruly horse needs to be held in by a bridle, but one that is well broken in is better managed by a gentler hand than a biting bit.

The case of the saint would certainly be a perilous one if there was no stronger restraint upon his lusts than the fear of Hell: how far does such fear restrain the ungodly! As the nature of a cause determines the nature of its effects, and as a man’s conduct will be determined by the most powerful principle governing him, so a slavish fear can produce only slavish observance and surely God requires something better than *that* from His people. Such service as the fear of Hell produces will be weak and wavering, for nothing more unsettles the mind and enervates the soul than alarms and horrors. Nabal’s heart “died within” him for fear (1 Sam 25:37), and the soldiers that kept the sepulchre “became as dead men” for fear (Matt 28:4): thus any obedience from thence can only be a dead obedience. Moreover, it will be fickle and fleeting at the best: Pharaoh relaxed his persecution of the Hebrews when no longer tormented by God’s plagues, and even gave them permission to leave Egypt; but soon after he repented of his leniency, chiding himself for it, and pursued them with murder in his heart (Exo 14:5). Those hypocrites whom “fearfulness” surprised, remained hypocrites still (Isa 33:14).

It is true that believers are bidden to “fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell” (Matt 10:28), yet it should be pointed out that there is a vast difference between fearing *God* and dreading

eternal punishment, in the parallel and fuller passage Christ added, "yea, I say unto you, Fear *Him*" (Luke 12:5)—not fear Hell! One of the covenant promises which God has made concerning His elect is, "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer 32:40), and that is a filial fear, a respect for His authority, an awesome veneration of His majesty; whereas the fear of the unregenerate is a servile, anxious and tormenting one. The holy fear of the righteous causes them to be vigilant and watchful against those ways which lead to destruction, but the fear of the wicked is occupied only with the destruction itself: the one is concerned about the evils which occasion God's wrath, the other is confined to the effects of his wrath. But the exercise of faith and the operations of filial fear are not the only principles which regulate the saint, the love of Christ constrains him, gratitude unto God for His wondrous grace has a powerful effect upon his conduct. —AWP

DAGON DESTROYED

We closed our last article by calling attention to a striking omission: that in the closing verse of 1 Samuel 4 and the opening ones of 5 there is no hint that the Nation was filled with consternation at their loss of the sacred ark or that they made any attempt to recover it, or that they cried unto the Lord to intervene. Instead, they seemed to have been quite unmoved by such an unprecedented calamity, and taking the line of least resistance remained inert. Yet if we take into consideration all the attendant circumstances we should not be surprised. Consider the *time* when it occurred. It was at some point within the period covered by the book of Judges, and in that book we are told four times "In those days there was no king in Israel," and twice it is added "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," which is ever the case when there is no strong central authority. But more: the *priesthood* had failed, yea, was abominably corrupt (1 Sam 2:12-17,22), and thus Israel was without competent leaders either spiritual or civil. What then could be expected of the rank and file of the people!

"When the Philistines took the ark of God they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon" (1 Sam 5:2). In their most recent form we regard the Philistines as the "Modernists," the "Rationalists," the "Higher Critics," who captured the majority of the seminaries and theological institutions; dominated religious literature, gained possession of almost all the most influential pulpits, and thereby secured control of the public Testimony of God, corrupting the ministerial springs at their source. And what are we to understand by "Dagon" in this connection? It was the "god" of the Philistines, the idol to which they paid homage (Judg 16:23). That idol was a monstrosity, being fashioned after a fish in its lower half but after the human form in its upper (1 Sam 5:4, margin): thus it portrayed the worship of man plus something inferior in the scale of being. Unto such "strong delusion" were they given up as to worship a non-entity, a figment of their own imagination, something resembling the fabled "mermaid."

And was not "Evolution"—the theory that man has come from the animals and they from fishes—the grand idol of all the apostate professors and teachers! And what grew out of it? A logical corollary of the Evolutionary theory was the flesh-pleasing idea of *the progress of man* and his wonderful achievements. These were crystallized in the imposing expression "Civilisation," or "our Christian civilisation," or more recently "our twentieth-century civilisation." Pulpit and press, politicians and educational authorities have united in lauding "the steady march of progress," the tremendous "advance" which has been made, and the utopia which would soon be established in the world. God allowed almost a century to pass for the full development of the modern "Dagon," that the pride and folly of its deluded devotees might the more plainly appear, for it was in 1848 Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" appeared—popularised for the masses by Henry Drummonds "The *Ascent of Man*." Yet side by side with the trumpeting forth of progress and advancement there has been an ever increasing and more widely spread spiritual deterioration and moral degeneracy.

If our memory serves us correctly it was in the 1908 issues of "Things to Come," a monthly edited by E. W. Bullinger, there appeared some striking articles from the pen of P. Mauro, entitled "The state of the crops," being a topical excursus on the words "The harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev 14:15). In them he pointed out how results showed that the natural efforts and attainments of man had already reached their limits, that whether in literary productions, musical compositions, painting or forms of architecture nothing

was now being achieved which excelled the fruits of previous generations, that the best being brought forth in these fields of human industry were but replicas or inferior imitations of what our fathers and forefathers possessed. But if the summit of attainment had already been reached by 1908, how far has the world traveled down the incline on the farther side since then!

Some one has said, "The popular taste is a good index to the health of society." Apply that dictum to our own times and it will quickly appear how the mental and moral health of society has declined. The vast majority now prefer such minor poets as Yeates and Bottomley to the superior excellency of Wordsworth and Tennyson; the crude and hideous sculptures of Robin and Epstein to those of the ancient Greeks; the grotesque and crazy productions of the "cubist" and "surrealist" schools to the masterpieces of Raphael and Turner; the jazz of the jungle and the crooning of Harlem to the strains of Beethoven; the ethical standards of Shaw to Shakespeare's; the modern "thriller" to the more wholesome fiction of Thackeray and Scott. No matter in which direction we turn it is the ugly and the vulgar which is preferred to the beautiful and refined. What a commentary on our so-called "progress."

This "progress" which has been so much advertised and acclaimed has been merely a mechanical one and not a spiritual and moral. The past century has indeed witnessed some remarkable inventions, but how far have they contributed to the real good of mankind? Electricity and incandescent gas has replaced the candles and oil-lamps of our forebears, but has there been a corresponding increase of spiritual illumination among the people? Steam and petrol power have largely superceded carriages and drays drawn by horses but have they issued in any moral elevation? The present generation has taken to flying in the air, but there is no evidence of increased heavenly mindedness. On the lowest ground, these inventions have failed to produce more contentment and mental serenity. And do not the losses entailed by these modern devices far outweigh any gains? Witness the appalling "toll of the road": in America and Britain tens of thousands killed and hundreds of thousands maimed every year! Witness the towns and cities of Europe blasted into ruins from the air! Would it not be a mercy if the clock of "progress" could be pushed back a hundred years?

It matters not which aspect we consider of modern "Progress" for its thin veneer of delusion is easily seen though if the examination be made coolly and critically. For example, how proud the boastings of a generation or so ago about our "Prison Reforms" and our more enlightened treatment of crime when in reality a maudlin sentimentality was allowed to oust a sense of justice. The eugenist contemplates morals principally from a utilitarian viewpoint. The modern scientist virtually denies the responsibility of the criminal, contending that he is the helpless victim of heredity and environment. "Social workers" affirm that society and not the criminal is to blame. In consequence the retributive element in punishment has been more and more displaced by the reformatory. Short sentences became increasingly popular and prisoners increasingly petted. A premium was practically placed upon crime by making the lot of the culprit pleasanter, certainly more secure, than that of the average workman. It makes no difference to these theorists that the virtuous (though outnumbered) are to be met with in the slums, while some of the most vicious spring from good parents and excellent homes.

Instead of asking the question, what harvest could be expected from such a sowing? we would push our inquiry further back and ask, Was this highly praised movement actuated by nobler or inferior principles to those which have regulated our fathers? It is a simple matter for the objector to reply, this generation is more tempered by mercy than were previous ones. It is equally simple for us to deny it. But let us ask, Is the criminal the only one entitled to mercy? what of *his victims*—the thousands of comparatively poor people robbed by swindlers and tricksters. Is it lack of mercy which seeks to throw a wall of protection around the weak and gullible, by imposing such penalties as are likely to deter those who would prey upon them? Then prisons ought not to be made so attractive that they cease to be a deterrent to crime. Is it unmerciful to pass the death-sentence on a slayer if an hundred potential murderers are curbed by such an example? Let justice be tempered by mercy, but not a mercy which closes its eyes to the essential difference between right and wrong.

Suffer us to allude unto one other aspect of our twentieth-century progress, namely, the enormous efforts which have been made by the state to raise the "standard of life" for the labouring classes. Fabulous sums have been spent during the last twenty years in "doles," "pensions," and "family allowances." Even the unprecedented cost of the present war was not allowed to curtail the colossal upkeep of the "social services." And *has* the "standard of life" been raised at all? The answer to that question depends upon your standard of measurement. Better fed and better housed working-men certainly have not produced better workmanship! As the majority of impartial and competent observers foresaw, the "dole" has been most demoralizing, destroying in many the incentive to earn their bread honestly by the sweat of the brow. Nor

has it produced more contentment: the more they be given, the more they expect—demand. What proportion of the huge sums spent in doles and allowances found its way into the pockets of publicans, brewers, distillers, dog-racing proprietors, and amusement caterers.

To return unto 1 Samuel 5. The sacred ark had been captured by the Philistines and Israel tamely submitted to their loss. It looked as though the Lord Himself was indifferent, for He put no obstacle in the way of His enemies and even permitted them to conclude that Dagon was greater than Himself. That is why, after recounting the calamities recorded in 1 Samuel 4—see 78:60-65—the Psalmist uses those striking figures of speech: “Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine” (78:65). Jehovah now took into His own hands the work of avenging His outraged honour and vindicating His great name. God is a jealous God: He had shown Himself such by severely chastising His friends, because they had long tolerated unjudged evils in their midst. And now the fierceness of His jealousy should be felt by His foes. He made bare His right arm and smote His insulting adversaries, and He continued to smite until they were compelled to recognize *Who* it was that was dealing with them.

“And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord” (1 Sam 5:3). Once more we express our conviction that the history of Dagon contains an allegorical significance, that it portrays what has occurred again and again in the lives of different nations and empires, yea that it gives us a pattern of what has been and is taking place in the world before our own eyes. It is a revelation of the unchanging principles in the governmental dealings of God, and therefore is fraught with important spiritual instruction. The “Dagon” worshipped by our moderns is the so-called “Christian Civilisation.” And what happened *to it*, my reader, during 1914-1918? when the most “cultured” and “highly civilised” of the nations engaged each other in a contest of such gigantic dimensions and ruthless ferocity, employed such diabolical means and methods and sacrificed the flower of their manhood to such an appalling extent, that the whole range of human history supplies no parallel. Man has prated of his ascent from the animal, and it was left to the disciples of such a philosophy to demonstrate how beastly they still were. Proud “civilisation” was shaken to its foundations, humiliated into the dust, flung on its very face in 1914-1918.

And what was the Philistines’ response to their humiliating experience? Did they acknowledge the Hand that had overturned their idol? Did they own their insensate folly and confess they were vainly fighting against Heaven? No, they did not, for the next thing we read of is that “they took Dagon and set him in his place again” (v 3). They were still determined that Dagon should be their “god.” See the blinding and besotting power of self-will. How true it is that “they that make them [the senseless idols] are like unto them” (Psa 115:8)! And what effect did the frightful tragedy of 1914-1918 have upon the nations of Christendom? Was there a general turning unto God and an humbling of themselves before Him? No, in the language of Isaiah 26:10, 11 it had to be said “They *will not* behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they *will not see*.” Neither the goodness of God nor the severity of God made any impression: they continued to harden their hearts and followed out their mad dreamings.

May we not see in the institution of the League of Nations with the wonderful benefits it was going to confer upon mankind in the restablisng and securing of “Civilisation” the setting up again of “Dagon”? Was not the widely preached “Universal Brotherhood of Man” now to receive practical expression by the nations of the earth banded together as they never had been before. Might was now to give place to right, force to reason. In future, disputes should be justly but amicably settled by arbitration and war would be rendered impossible. The world would now be “made safe for democracy.” Civilisation would at last stand upon a firm basis and the steady march of progress which had been so rudely interrupted, could be resumed with an ever-brightening prospect. Such in brief were the promises made and the hopes inspired by that wonderful production of twentieth-century politicians and diplomats. And what a will ‘o the wisp it proved!

The “march of progress” from 1920 onwards, was, if measured by the standards of righteousness and decency, steadily downwards and not upwards. During the fifteen years that followed, “Civilised Britain” became more and more a “Continentalised Britain,” a “Paganised Britain.” That which our fathers had so carefully erected their children took pleasure in tearing down. Everything which had ennobled the “Victorian” era was sneered at and jettisoned. Those with the least sense of decency were determined to drag down into the gutter the whole of the rising generation. An orgy of licentiousness was widely entered into. Night-clubs were multiplied, dog-racing tracks opened all over the country, gambling spread like wild fire among the young people and cocktail parties abounded on every side. The beaches lowered their bathing restrictions and modesty became a thing of the past. Youth was allowed to have its fling unrestrained. The sanctity of the Sabbath totally disappeared, the Lord’s day being devoted to pleasuring and carousing.

Mayfair became another Harlem and other places emulated their very example or attempted to “go one worse.” The novels and magazines of the last decade have been filled with obscenities and blasphemies. A friend of ours engaged in the publishing business years ago recently wrote us, “To-day we have shops stacked with books which, had they been published when we were boys the authors and publishers would have been put in jail.” Censorship has long since been reduced to a farce. The great majority of the children never entered either a “Sunday school” or “church” in the years between 1920-38 and their ideas were formed by the pictures they saw at the “movies” and the debasing productions of a degenerate press. As a recent writer said “the Evangelical Christian,” “The best sellers of to-day are more often than not books whose morals are of the barnyard, whose language is of the sewer and whose ethics are of the pit. The ghastly thing is that you will find such novels prominently displayed and often commended by large Church publishing houses.”

And what was the sequel to the Philistines setting up again of their idol? This, “And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the fishy part was left to him” (v 12). Thus did Jehovah again stain their pride and write folly across that which they were so determined to honour. This time Dagon was not only overturned but dashed to pieces, losing its head and hands—the members which speak of wisdom and power—so that nothing but the stump remained. In its present application the realization of this is not to be looked for in any particular act or event, but in a process of decay and demolition. As the recent withdrawal of the Spirit in Christendom was gradual, covering an interval of several years; as the overturning of Dagon was most noticeable during 1914-1918; so the final destruction of Dagon, though the pace of deterioration has greatly increased, may be extended over a longer or shorter period.

There is no doubt in this writer’s mind that the present generation is even now witnessing and will continue to witness the smashing up of the much-vaunted modern Dagon. It was surely significant that the three men occupying the most prominent and influential positions in modern life, namely, Mr. N. Chamberlain, the prime-minister of Great Britain, Mr. F. Roosevelt, the president of the USA, and the pope from the Vatican all placed themselves on record in public statements in 1938, that if the threatened war of Europe eventuated it would mean and entail “The end of Civilisation as we know it.” No doubt they alluded more especially to the material and financial structure, for most of the ethical and spiritual elements, the best features of our corporate life, that which made for refinement and elevation of the mind, had well-nigh disappeared from the world when those men made their pronouncements. How dreadfully everything has gone from bad to worse since then may be gathered from the newspapers, though in their present abbreviated form only a small part of the tragedy is being chronicled.

The breakdown and breakup of “Civilisation” appears in such things as the decay of the sanctity of marriage—as evidenced by the multiplication of divorces, the abandonment of such numbers of babies, the fearful increase of bigamy; juvenile delinquency and of immorality and disease among the young, the vandalism which is now so rife, such widespread pilfering, the appalling amount of absenteeism in all sections of labour, and the supine efforts of the authorities to deal with such evils. English law carries a penalty of seven years for the crime of bigamy, yet guilty ones rarely receive more than three months. Thousands of culprits who ought to be sent to prison are given nominal fines. Recently an ARP chief in a big London borough, when deploring the wanton injury inflicted on the “shelters,” complained that “We have had fines as low as 1/- (25 cents) against young hooligans caught damaging shelter equipment.” Law and order is almost reduced to a farce. The chief officer for the LMS railway stated, “In the past year 8,600 carriage windows had been broken; 19,300 door-straps removed, 40,000 electric lamps removed.” The head of Dagon is already broken off!

It is said “the war is responsible for these evils.” Not so: war conditions have merely brought things to a head and caused the scum to rise to the surface. “He that is an hireling...seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth...The hireling fleeth because he *is* a hireling” (John 10:12,13) reveals the principle. We do what we do because we are what we are. There is ever a rigid consistency between character and conduct. When the testing time comes each one reveals what he is by what he does. Character is most revealed by our conduct in the *crises* of life. When did the “hireling” flee? When he saw the wolf approaching: that was not what made him an hireling, but *discovered him* as such—one with no love for the sheep. Present conditions have caused the masses to drop all pretence and come out in their true colours. The thin coating of “civilised” varnish has worn off and twentieth-century character stands exposed.

But even when Dagon was destroyed something yet more drastic was required to bring the Philistines to their senses. “The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod and He destroyed them, and smote

them with emerods" (v 6). They removed the ark to Gath, and "a very great destruction" smote the men there also (v 9). They sent it to Ekron and its inhabitants were so terrified they demanded that the ark be returned to Israel (v 11). Thus did God avenge Himself and make the wrath of man to praise Him. Never did a boastful people undergo so deep a dishonour in the eyes of their neighbours, to whom they became a laughing stock; and never did an idol suffer a worse disgrace than that which befell Dagon. Afterwards the ark was restored again to Israel, and if history continues, in God's appointed time, after His judgments have accomplished their designed work, the Spirit will return to a purged Christendom and the Testimony of God be established again in its midst. —AWP

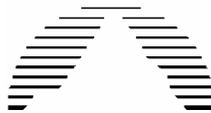
CONTENTS

The Word of His Grace.....	2
The Sermon on the Mount	5
<i>26f. Profession Tested: Matthew 7:24, 25</i>	
The Mission and Miracles of Elisha.....	9
<i>9. Sixth Miracle</i>	
The Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance.....	13
<i>9. Its Opposition</i>	
Dagon Destroyed	16

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.

Chapel Library is currently reprinting the monthly issues in sequence, mailing quarterly to subscribers in the USA as the Lord enables.



CHAPEL LIBRARY

2603 W. Wright St. • Pensacola, FL 32505
 850 438-6666 • fax: 850 438-0227
 chapel@mountzion.org • www.mountzion.org
A ministry of Mt. Zion Bible Church