

Volume 21—Studies in the Scriptures—October, 1942
DIVINE HEALING.

“Then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). We have no time to waste upon any who would raise the quibble that this verse refers to the healing of “land” and not of our *bodies*. But some who perceive that the principles of this verse *are* pertinent to cases of physical affliction will ask, Are we then to understand that where God has visited His people with temporal judgment and they comply with the conditions He has here specified, He will in every instance remove that judgment, that He will bestow immediate and complete healing? Ah, the terms of that question go beyond the terms of that promise—2 Chronicles 7:14 neither says He would heal their land “immediately” or “completely.” Nor must we when pondering the subject of Divine healing confine ourselves to this particular verse. For instance we read that the men of Jericho sought unto Elisha on behalf of their ground, saying, “the water is naught and the ground barren” (2 Kings 2:19). And we are told the Prophet said, “Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the springs of the waters and cast the salt in them and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have *healed* these waters; there shall not be from hence any more death or barren land” (vv. 20-21).

God could have healed those waters without any salt, as He could have made sweet the bitter waters at Marah without bidding Moses cast a certain tree into them (Exo. 15:23-25). Sometimes the Lord is pleased to use means and at other times dispense with them; for He exercises His sovereignty here as elsewhere. Perhaps some will say, This makes the subject more complex and hence more perplexing. Doubtless, and God may have so designed it. The natural man wants everything to be made smooth and easy for him. But God’s way is to stain human pride, to make us feel our insufficiency, to drive us to our knees. God would have our hearts to be *exercised* before Him, to have us cry constantly, “that which I see not teach Thou me” (Job 34:32). God would have us bring *each case*, each trial, each need, and spread it before Him and instead of assuming we must now act in the same way as we did before in a similar situation, look to Him for instruction and directions. “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him” (Psa. 62:5).

God is sovereign and does not act uniformly and we are both responsible and utterly dependent upon Him—therefore we must act neither irrationally nor presumptuously. God is sovereign: He did not always afflict Israel’s land with drought or pestilence when they displeased Him, nor does He afflict the Christian’s body each time he backslides or forsakes the highway of holiness. And when God did cause His judgment to fall upon Israel’s land, He did not always remove His stroke as soon as confession of sin was made and reformation of conduct was affected; nor will He in every instance remove sickness when the afflicted one acknowledges his faults and does “the first works.” And, as already pointed out, when God was pleased to heal Israel’s land, sometimes it was by blessing the means of His own appointing and at other times it was without the use of any means at all. Thus it is when He heals our bodies. To one blind man Christ gave sight instantly—to another He put His hands on his eyes a second time before he was fully restored (Mark 8:22-25).

Does someone say, All of this seems very confusing and gets me nowhere. No doubt it is so to the carnal mind. It is for the tried child of God we write and not for those who

wish to be spared all exercise of heart, like patients going to a doctor for a prescription so that nothing is required of them but to hand it to the chemist for him to make up. As intimated at the beginning of last month's article, the first duty of the ailing Christian is to inquire into the occasion or cause of his sickness: whether it be due to imprudence or intemperance, whether God be chastising him for some breach of His Law, or whether there be some other reason for it. Afflictions are sometimes sent upon the saints for their refining and pruning rather than for correction, that they may yield some of the choicest of all the spiritual fruits. Thus the believer who desires light on his situation must wait upon the Lord and say, "show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" (Job 10:2).

If the Lord has shown that the sickness is a mark of His displeasure because we have followed some wicked way, then our course is clear, namely, to conduct ourselves according to the requirements of 2 Chronicles 7:14. Having done so, then what? Appropriate its promise, yet meekly and not presumptuously. Having righted the wrong before God, having obtained His ear, now plead His word. Say, "Lord, I have sought to humble myself, pray, seek Thy face, and renounce my wicked ways and Thou assures me Thou wilt forgive and heal me: do as Thou hast said. But Lord, I am a poor ignorant creature and knowest not Thy mind: what wouldst Thou have me to do? Is it Thy pleasure to lay Thy restoring hand upon me this very moment? If so, enable me to trust in Thee with all my heart; or, wouldest Thou have me use some means? if so, graciously direct my mind and hand to them and cause me to count upon Thy making them efficacious unto me, so that I may trust Thee and not them, that the glory may be all Thine own."

"According to your *faith* be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29) is most pertinent unto our present inquiry. God is pledged to honour faith wherever He finds it: never does He fail those who trust Him fully, no not when they count upon Him working a miracle, as many can testify. But what is the "faith" here spoken of? It is one which rests upon the sure Word of God. It is one which is made up of two chief elements: expectation and submission. There are some who suppose those two things are subversive of each other, that the attitude of Not my will but Thine be done makes real expectation impossible. But that is wrong, through a mistaken conception of what spiritual expectation consists of. Let it first be said that where there is not genuine resignation there can be no true expectation. Spiritual submission is spreading my case before the Lord and asking Him to deal with it as He sees best and if I count upon His wisdom and goodness, that is the exercise of faith. If I have confidence He will do so, that is the expectation of faith—the expectation not that He will grant what my carnal nature desires but that He will give what is most for His glory and my highest good—anything other than that is not faith but *presumption*.

Some bodily infirmities are produced by the Devil, probably more than are commonly suspected. Job's boils were caused by him and we read of a daughter of Abraham "whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years" (Luke 13:16). Certainly it is neither an honour to the Lord nor a credit to His child for one of them to be overcome by the Enemy. Nor need he be, for it is written, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), to which should be added "whom resist steadfastly in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). Many years ago it was arranged that we should speak in a certain city church and a few hours before the service we were suddenly attacked by a heavy cold and developed a high temperature. The friends with whom we were staying urged us to cancel the

engagement and phone another preacher to deputize, for it was pouring with rain and a long walk was before us. But we realized Satan was hindering and committed ourselves into the hands of our Master, counting upon Him to protect us from any harm. He did so: and next morning we were quite normal. On another occasion we lost our voice and could speak in only a hoarse whisper but we trusted the Lord to undertake, and preached for an hour and a half without any inconvenience and could be heard easily in the remotest corners of the large building, yet as soon as we left the pulpit we could not speak at all. No, He never fails those who trust HIM.

The subject is many-sided and much has to be left unsaid. It is clear to us that many Christians are living below their privileges in this matter. "Jehovah-Rophi" ("The Lord that healeth thee": Exo. 15:26) is as truly one of His titles as "Jehovah-Tsidkenu" ("the Lord our Righteousness": Jer. 23:6) yet how few count upon Him as such, having more confidence in human physicians and their medicines! Fewer still seem to know anything about trusting the Lord for help and how to obtain from Him a renewing of physical strength, yet Scripture not only tells us our body must be "for the Lord" but adds "and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor. 6:13). It is written "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" (James 5:15), yet the exercise of faith is not subject to a mere effort of the will. It is our duty to pray, "Lord, increase our faith," yet that prayer will not be answered unless we use what we already have (Luke 8:18). Broadly speaking, when sickness prevents the discharge of duty, it is our privilege to count upon the Lord to remove the hindrance.

In closing, let it be said we are far from affirming that all who resort to material remedies are missing the Lord's best, though in many instances that is probably the case. Nor are we saying that God is always ready to heal if we trust Him. Rather is it His will that some should glorify Him "in the fires" (Isa. 24:15). God sent an angel to deliver Peter from prison, but suffered Stephen to be stoned to death. Some plants thrive best in burning heat, whereas ferns flourish in the shade. Certain graces, like zeal and intrepidity, are exercised on the battlefield, whereas meekness and patience are developed under suffering. God does not intend that many should do such a work as George Muller did and therefore He gives not faith for it, and those who imitate him fail. The privilege and duty of each Christian is defined in "Commit thy way unto the LORD: trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psa. 37:5). Bring *what* to pass? His way, the best way, though it may be the very opposite of what you wish. Commit your case unto Him, trustfully, and leave Him to decide what will be most for His glory. If the sickness persists, beg God to sanctify it to you.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

25. *False Prophets: Matthew 7:15.*

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). If there is any verse in Holy Writ where it is deeply important to observe (and heed!) *its connection* it is surely the one at which we have now arrived. It may appear to the casual reader that our Lord here began an entirely new subject having little or no relation to what immediately precedes. It is true our present verse introduces a distinct section of His Sermon, yet it also bears directly on what He had just said. Having described most solemnly and searchingly the Way of Life, like a faithful Guide, Christ went on to warn us against one of the chief impediments to walking in that way, namely, *false guides*—those who under the pretence of offering us Divine directions therein will fatally deceive us if we give heed thereto. In every age but never more so than in our own, multitudes of gullible souls have been allured into the broad road which leads to destruction by men professing to be teachers of the Truth and ministers of Christ, yet who had not His Spirit and who were none of His: blind leaders of the blind, who with their dupes fall into the ditch.

“Beware of false prophets.” The force of this exhortation will be the better perceived if we take to heart what is found in the Old Testament thereon, bearing in mind that history has ever repeated itself since human nature is the same in all ages. “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means” (Jer. 5:30, 31). “Then said the LORD unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake I unto them; they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought and the conceit of their heart” (Jer. 14:14). “I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness; they are all of them unto Me as Sodom . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you, they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, not out of the mouth the LORD” (Jer. 23:14, 16). “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey: they have devoured souls, they have taken the treasure and precious things, they have made her many widows” (Ezek. 22:25). False prophets were one of the chief factors in the apostasy and destruction of Israel and these passages are recorded for our admonition and warning.

It must not be supposed that such deceivers passed away with the ending of the Mosaic economy. The Lord Jesus and His Apostles announced there should be false teachers in this Christian dispensation. Christ declared that “many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many,” yea, they would present such imposing credentials that “if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:11, 24). Paul announced, “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch” (Acts 20:29, 31). And again he said, “Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17, 18). Peter foretold, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even

denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways” (2 Peter 2:1, 2). John gave warning, “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Immediately after the parable of the Sower, Christ declared, “His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” (Matt. 13:25), the one so closely resembling the other that He commanded, “Let both grow together until the harvest,” when it will be seen there is no corn in the ears of the deceitful tares. By placing those parables in juxtaposition the Lord Jesus exposed the method and order of His adversary. “As Jannes and Jambres (the “magicians” of Pharaoh) withstood Moses” (2 Tim. 3:8) by their imitating his miracles, so when God sends forth His servants to preach the Gospel the Devil soon after prompts his emissaries to proclaim “another gospel.” When God speaks the Devil gives a mocking echo. Satan has found that he can work far more effectively by counterfeiting the Truth than by openly denying it, hence in every age “false prophets” have abounded, and therefore we should be neither surprised nor stumbled by their number or success in our own day. We fully agree with Andrew Fuller when he said, “As this word ‘beware of false prophets’ was designed for Christians of every age, the term rendered ‘prophets’ must here, as it often is elsewhere, be used of ordinary teachers.”

“Beware of false prophets” signifies in this dispensation, be on your guard against false teachers, heretical preachers. There are no longer any “prophets” in the strict and technical sense of the term, though there are a few of God’s servants who in their gifts and special work approximate closely thereto. Those against whom we are here warned are men who have a false commission, never having been called of God to the service they engage in. They preach error which is subversive of “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3); and the fruit they bear is a base imitation of the fruit of the Spirit. The chief identifying mark of the false prophets has ever been their saying “Peace, peace” when there is none (Jer. 23:17; Micah 3:5; 1 Thess. 5:3). They heal the wounds of sinners slightly (Jer. 8:11) and daub “with untempered mortar” (Ezek. 13:14; 22:28). They prophesy “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10), inventing easy ways to Heaven, pandering to corrupt nature. There is nothing in their preaching which searches the conscience and renders the empty professor uneasy, nothing which humbles and causes their hearers to mourn before God; but rather that which puffs up, makes them pleased with themselves and rest content in a false assurance.

The general characteristic of “false prophets” is that they make vital godliness to be a less strict and more easy thing than it actually is, more agreeable to fallen human nature and thus they encourage the unregenerate to be satisfied with something which comes short of true grace. So the Pharisees did, notwithstanding all their strictness (Matt. 23:25). So the Papists do, notwithstanding their boasted austerities. So Arminians do, notwithstanding all their seeming zeal for good works. So the Antinomians do notwithstanding their pretended superior light and joy, zeal and confidence. This is the common mark of all false teachers: rejecting the Divine way, they manufacture one to suit themselves and however they may differ among themselves they all agree to make the practice of piety and the Christian walk an easier thing than the Scriptures do—to offer salvation on cheaper terms—to make the gate wider and the way to Heaven broader than did Christ and His Apostles. It is this which explains the secret of their popularity: “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them” (1

John 4:5). But of such Christ warns His people to “beware,” for they feed souls with poison and not with the pure milk of the Word.

“Which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). In those words Christ emphasized the *danger* of these false prophets: the character they assumed is well calculated to deceive the unwary. The Lord here alluded to a device, employed by false prophets in former times who counterfeited the true servants of God by wearing their distinctive attire. Elijah, in regard to his garments, was called “a hairy man” (2 Kings 1:8), and therefore when John the Baptist came “in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah)” (Luke 1:17) we are told that he “had his raiment of camel’s hair” (Matt. 3:4). When then the agents of Satan posed as the true prophets they counterfeited their attire that they might more easily seduce the people, as is clear from Zechariah 13:4, where Jehovah declared that a day would come when the Prophet should be ashamed of the vision he had prophesied and should no more wear “a garment of hair to deceive.” Thus by this evident reference Christ intimated the plausible pretences of the heretical teachers, the subterfuges which they would employ to conceal their real character and design, thereby stressing what *dangerous* persons they are and how urgent is the need for His people to be constantly on their guard against those who seek their destruction.

“Which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). They pose as being the very opposite of what they really are. They are agents of the Evil One, yet claim to be the servants of the Holy One. Their place is on the outside, in the forests and mountains, yet they intrude themselves within the fold. This intimates their great craftiness and seeming piety. People think they are teaching them the way to Heaven, when in fact they are conducting them to Hell. Often they are difficult to discover, for they “creep into house, and lead captive silly women” (2 Tim. 3:6), yea, even in apostolic times some of them successfully “crept in unawares” (Jude 4) into the assemblies of the saints. It was of such Paul wrote when he said, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ; and no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Though their clothing be “sheep’s” they have the fierceness and cruelty of wolves.

In addition to their subtlety and plausibility, frequently accompanied by a most winsome personality and an apparently saintly walk, there is a real danger of our being deceived by these false prophets and receiving their erroneous teaching by virtue of the fact that there is that *within the Christian* himself which responds to and approves of their lies. How immeasurably this intensifies our peril! That which flatters is pleasing to the flesh; that which abases is distasteful. Paul complains of this very thing to the Corinthians: some had evidently resented his plain speaking in the first Epistle, wherein he had rebuked their sins, for in his second he wrote, “would to God ye could bear with me a little” (11:1). The *Galatians* first received the Gospel so gladly from him that they would have plucked out their eyes had that advantaged him (4:15), yet soon after they imbibed deadly error from the Judaisers and when the Apostle took them to task for this he had to ask them, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (v. 16). Thus it was with the multitudes in connection with our Saviour: acclaiming Him

with their hosannas and less than a week later crying, "Away with Him, crucify Him," so fickle and treacherous is the human heart.

What point does this give to our Lord's command, "take heed *what* ye hear" (Mark 4:24). Corrupt nature is thoroughly in love with error and will more readily and eagerly receive false than true doctrine. Should any dispute our statement we would refer them to "the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means, and My people *love to have it so*" (Jer. 5:31). Said Christ unto the Jews, "because I tell you the truth ye believe Me not" (John 8:45): what a commentary on fallen human nature—had He preached *lies*, they had promptly received Him. Alas, what is man: he will run greedily after something new and sensational, but is soon bored by the old old story of the Gospel. How feeble is the Christian, how weak his faith, how fickle and unstable the moment he is left to himself. Peter, the most courageous and forward of the Apostles in his profession, denied his Master when challenged by a maid. Even when given a heart to love the Truth we still have "itching ears" for novelties and errors, as the Israelites welcomed the manna at first but soon grew weary of it and lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt. Real and urgent then is our need to heed this command, "*Beware of false prophets.*"

It is time that we should now proceed to amplify the thought expressed in our opening paragraph. In the previous section of His Sermon, Christ had contrasted the broad road and the many who tread it and the Narrow Way and the few who find it, adding immediately, "Beware of false prophets." Now the Narrow Way which leads unto life is the Way of Salvation and therefore the warning given us must have respect to those who teach or present an erroneous way of salvation, thereby placing the souls of their listeners in imminent peril—for to accept their false teachings is fatal. Thus the tremendous importance of our present passage is at once apparent. As the verse quoted from 2 Peter tells us, it is nothing short of "damnable heresies" which these false prophets promulgate. It is about salvation matters they treat, but damnation is the end of those who receive their lies unless God intervenes with a miracle of grace and disillusion their dupes, which very rarely happens. It therefore behooves each of us to seriously ask, Have I been deceived by these false prophets? am I treading a way which "seemeth right" unto me but which God declares is the way of "death" (Prov. 14:12). It behooves us to sincerely and earnestly beseech God to make unmistakably clear to us *which* "Way" we are really treading.

Now it is the duty of God's servants to provide help to exercised souls on this supremely important matter, to expose the lies of these "false prophets," to make plain the way of salvation. This may best be done by defining and showing the relation of *good works* unto salvation, for it is at this point more than any other the emissaries of Satan have fatally deceived souls. The principal errors which have been advanced thereon may be summed up under these two heads: salvation *by* works, and salvation *without* works. Romanists have been the chief promulgators of the former, insisting that the good works of the Christian have a meritorious value which entitles him to Heaven. Thereby they rob Christ of much of His glory, bringing in something of ours in addition to His blood and righteousness to obtain acceptance with God. Romanists do not repudiate in total either the grace of God or the redemption of Christ, but they *nullify* both by attributing saving efficacy unto the rites of their church, and the performances of the creature. Such an error

is expressly repudiated by such Scriptures as Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

The principal propagators of the salvation *without* works error, during the last century, have been the Plymouth Brethren and those (like the "Bible Institutes" and the majority of the "Fundamentalists") who have echoed their teaching. They have gone to the opposite extreme and preached a "gospel" as far removed from the Truth as the Romanist lie of salvation *by* works. They teach that while good works from Christians are certainly desirable, they are not imperative, the absence of them involving merely the loss of certain "millennial" honours and not the missing of Heaven itself. They have interpreted those words of Christ's, "It is finished," in such a way as to lull multitudes of souls into a false peace, as though He wrought something at the Cross which renders it needless for sinners to repent, forsake their idols, renounce the world before they can be saved—that "nothing is required from them but their simple acceptance of Christ by faith." They teach that once they have "rested on His finished work"—no matter what their subsequent lives—they are "eternally secure." So widely has this fatal doctrine been received, so thoroughly have these ravenous wolves deceived the religious world by their "sheep's clothing" that with rare exceptions anyone who now denounces this deadly evil is to call down upon himself the charge of being a "Legalist" or "Judaizer."

Before we endeavour to show the place which good works have in connection with salvation, let us quote a few sentences from a brief article we wrote in this magazine some years ago. "It is finished: do those blessed words signify that Christ so satisfied the requirements of God's holiness that that holiness no longer has any real and pressing claims upon us? Did Christ 'magnify the Law and make it honourable' (Isa. 42:21) that we might be lawless? Did He fulfill all righteousness to purchase for us an immunity from loving God with all our hearts and serving Him with all our faculties? Did Christ die in order to secure a Divine indulgence that we might live to please self? . . . Christ died not to make my sorrow for and hatred of sin useless. Christ died not to absolve me from the full discharge of my responsibilities unto God. Christ died not so that I might go on retaining the friendship and fellowship of the world . . . The 'finished work' of Christ avails me nothing if my heart has not been broken by an agonizing consciousness of my sinfulness. It avails me nothing if I still love the world (1 John 2:15). It avails me nothing unless I am 'a new creature in Christ Jesus' (2 Cor. 5:17)."

Since, then, salvation *by* works and salvation *without* works are equally opposed to God's way of salvation, what is the place or relation which good "works" hold to the saving of a soul? Let us first define our terms. By "good works" we mean those operations of our hearts and hands which are performed in obedience to God's will, which proceed from evangelical principles and which have in view the Divine glory. By "salvation" we include not only regeneration (which is simply the beginning of it in our experience) but sanctification and an actual entrance into Heaven itself. Thus "godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10), unreserved surrender to the Lordship of Christ (Matt. 11:29; Luke 14:33), the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26; Heb. 5:9), enduring to the end in sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), love to God (Matt. 24:12, 13), and the way of holiness (Heb. 3:15) are all "good works" and are indispensably necessary if we are to escape the everlasting burnings. The good Shepherd "goeth before" His sheep (John 10:4) and if they are to join Him on High they must "*follow* Him"—"leaving

us an example, that we should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). There is no reaching Heaven except by treading the only path that leads there—the highway of holiness.

The subject we are now dealing with is far too important to be condensed into a few brief and general statements, therefore as our present space is almost exhausted we shall conclude with this paragraph and (D.V.) enter into more detail next month. That good works are neither the chief or the procuring cause of salvation is readily admitted but that they are no cause whatever, that they are simply “fruits” of salvation and not a means thereto, we as definitely deny. On the one hand good works must be kept strictly subordinate to the grace of God and the merits of Christ: on the other hand they must not be entirely excluded. It is the corn the farmer sows which produces the crop. But it is equally true that the fertility of the ground and the showers and sunshine from Heaven are indispensable for an harvest. Given the finest seed, the richest soil, the most favourable season, would the farmer have anything to reap if he failed to plow his ground and sow his seed? But does that furnish room for the farmer to boast? Certainly not: who provided him with the seed and ground, who furnished him with health and strength, who granted the increase in his labours? Nevertheless, had he remained inactive there would be no crop.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

34. *His Last Task.*

“And Elijah departed” (2 Kings 1:4). At his Master’s bidding the Prophet had gone forth to meet the servants of Ahaziah and delivered what the Lord had commissioned him. He had sent them back with his message to their king and then took his leave of them. His departure was not for the purpose of concealing himself but to return to his communion with God. It was to “the top of a hill” (v. 9) that he retired: typically it spoke of moral separation from and elevation above the world. We have to betake ourselves to “the secret place of the Most High”—and this is not to be found near the giddy and bustling crowds—if we are to “abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psa. 91:1). It is from the Mercy seat His voice is heard speaking (Num. 7:89). We have before seen Elijah making for the mountain-top as soon as his public work was completed (1 Kings 18:42). What an object lesson is there here for all the servants of Christ: that when they have delivered their message, to retire from the public eye and get alone with God, as their Saviour before them was wont to do. The “top of the hill” is also the place of observation and vision: O to make spiritual observatories of our closets!

There is nothing in the sacred narrative which indicates the nationality of these messengers of Ahaziah. If they were Israelites they could scarcely be ignorant of the Prophet’s identity when he so suddenly accosted them and so dramatically announced the doom of their master. If they were foreigners, imported from Tyre by Jezebel, they were probably ignorant of the mighty Tishbite, for some years had elapsed since his last public appearance. Whoever they were, these men were so impressed by that commanding figure and his authoritative tone, so awed by his knowledge of their mission and so terrified by his pronouncement that they at once abandoned their quest and returned to the king. He who could tell what Ahaziah thought and said could evidently foretell the outcome of his sickness: they dared not proceed on their journey to Ekron. That illustrated an important principle. When a servant of God is energized by the Holy Spirit his message carries conviction and strikes terror into the hearts of his hearers: just as Herod “feared” John the Baptist (Mark 6:20) and Felix “trembled” before Paul (Acts 24:25). But it is not talking to the wicked about the *love of God* which will produce such effects, nor will such conscience-soothers be owned of Heaven. Rather is it those who declare, as Elijah of Ahaziah, “Thou shalt surely die.”

“And when the messengers turned back unto him (Ahaziah), he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?” (2 Kings 1:5). It must have been both a surprise and a shock to the king when his servants returned unto him so quickly, for he knew that sufficient time had not elapsed for them to have journeyed to Ekron in Philistia and back again. His question expresses annoyance, a reprimand for their being remiss in discharging his commission. Kings in that day were accustomed to receive blind obedience from their subjects and woe be unto those who crossed their imperial wills. This only serves to emphasize the effect which the appearance and words of Elijah made upon them. From the next verse we learn that the Prophet had bidden them, “Go turn again unto the king that sent you” and repeat my message unto him! And though their so doing meant placing their lives in jeopardy, nevertheless they carried out the Prophet’s order. How they put to shame thousands of those professing to be the servants of Christ who for many years past have studiously withheld that which their auditors most needed to hear and criminally substituted a message of “Peace, peace” when there was no peace for them and that in

days when a faithful proclamation of the Truth had not endangered their persons. Surely these messengers of Ahaziah will yet rise up in judgment against all such faithless time-servers.

“And they said unto him, there came a man up to meet us and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you and say unto him, thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that thou sendest to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die” (v. 6). From their omission of his name and by referring to Elijah simply as “a man” it seems clear that these messengers of the king were ignorant of the Prophet’s identity. But they had been so overawed by his appearance and the solemnity of his manner and were so convinced his announcement would be verified that they deemed themselves warranted in abandoning their journey and returning to their master. Accordingly they delivered a plain straightforward account of what had occurred and faithfully reported Elijah’s pronouncement. They knew full well that such a message must prove most unwelcome to the king, yet they made no attempt to alter its tone or soften it down. They shrank not from telling Ahaziah to his face that sentence of death had gone out against him. Again we say, How these men put to shame the temporizing, cowardly and pew-flattering occupants of the pulpit! Alas, how often is more sincerity and fidelity to be found among open worldlings than in those with the highest spiritual pretensions.

“And he said unto them, what manner of man was he which came up to meet you and told you these words?” (v. 7). No doubt the king was fairly well convinced as to who it was that had dared to cross their path and send him such a message, but to make quite sure he bids his servants describe the mysterious stranger: what was his appearance, how was he clothed, and in what manner did he address you? How that illustrates one of the chief traits of the unregenerate: it was not the *message* which Ahaziah now inquired about, but the *man* who uttered it—yet surely his own conscience would warn him that no mere man could be the author of such a message. And is not this the common tendency of the unconverted? that instead of taking to heart what is said, they fix their attention on who says it. Such is poor fallen human nature. When a true servant of God is sent and delivers a searching word, people seek to evade it by occupying themselves with his personality, his style of delivery, his denominational affiliation—anything secondary as long as it serves to crowd out that which is of supreme moment. Yet when the postman hands them an important business letter they are not concerned about *his* appearance.

“And they answered him, He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins” (v. 8). We do not regard this as a description of his person so much as of his attire. Concerning John the Baptist, who came “in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah)” (Luke 1:17) it is recorded that he “had his raiment of camel’s hair and a leathern girdle about his loins” (Matt. 3:4). Thus we understand that the outward garment of Elijah was made of skins (cf. Heb. 11:37), girded about by a strip of undressed leather. That the Prophets had some such distinguishing garb is clear from Zechariah 13:4 by the false prophets assuming the same in order to beguile the people: “a garment of hair to deceive.” In that era when instruction was made to the eye as well as the ear by symbols and shadows, that uncouth dress denoted the Prophet’s mortifiedness to the world and expressed his concern and sorrow for the idolatry and iniquity of his people, just as the putting on of “sackcloth” by others signified humility and grief.

“And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite” (2 Kings 1:8). There could be no mistake: the king knew now who it was that had sent such a solemn message to him. And what effect was produced upon him? Was he awed and humbled? Did he now bewail his sins and cry unto God for mercy? Far from it. He had learned nothing from his father’s awful end. The severe affliction under which he was suffering softened him not. Even the near approach of death made no difference. He was incensed against the Prophet and determined to destroy him. Had Elijah sent him a lying and flattering word, that had been acceptable, but the truth he could not bear. How like the degenerate generation in which our lot is cast, who had rather be bombed to death in places of amusement than be found on their faces before God. Ahaziah was young and arrogant, not at all disposed to receive reproof or endure opposition to his will, no matter from what quarter it proceeded, no, not even from Jehovah Himself. The message from Elijah, though in God’s name and by His express command, enraged the monarch beyond measure, and instantly he resolves on the death of the Prophet, though he had done nothing more than his duty.

“Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and behold, he sat on the top of a hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down” (v. 9). Ahaziah was at no loss to find wicked men ready to execute the most desperate and impious orders. This company of soldiers went forth promptly to seize the Lord’s servants. They found him sitting composedly upon an eminence. The spirit of the captain evidenced that his heart was thoroughly in his task, for he insolently addressed Elijah as “thou man of God,” which was by way of derision and insult. It was as though he had said, You claim Jehovah as your Master, we come to you in the name of a greater than he: king Ahaziah says, Come down! Fearful affront and blasphemy was that! It was not only an insult to Elijah, but to Elijah’s God, an insult which was not suffered to go unchallenged. How often in the past have the wicked made a mock of sacred things and turned the very terms by which God designates His people into epithets of reproach, sneeringly dubbing them “the elect,” “saints,” etc. That they do so no longer is because the fine gold has become dim, godliness is no more a reality and a rebuke to the impious. Who would think of designating the average clergyman a “man of God,” rather does he wish to be known as “a good mixer,” a man of the world.

“And Elijah answered, and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God then let fire come down from Heaven and consume thee and thy fifty” (v. 10). There was no personal vindictiveness in the terrible reply of Elijah, but a consuming zeal for the glory of God which had been so blatantly insulted by this captain. The king’s agent had jibed at his being a “man of God,” and now he should be furnished with summary proof whether or not the Maker of Heaven and earth owned the Prophet as His servant. The insolence and impiety of this man who had insulted Jehovah and His ambassador should meet with swift judgment. “And there came down fire from Heaven and consumed him and his fifty” (v. 10). Sure sign was this that Elijah had not been actuated by any spirit of revenge, for in such a case God had not responded to his appeal. On an earlier occasion the “fire of the Lord” had fallen upon and consumed the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38), but here it falls on sinners who had slighted that sacrifice. So shall it again be when “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7, 8). Luke 9:54 presents a contrast, for the disciples were not actuated by zeal for God’s glory.

Surely so manifest an interposition of God would serve as a deterrent if not to the abandoned king yet to his servants, so that no further attempt would be made to apprehend Elijah. But no: "Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly" (2 Kings 1:11). It is hard to say which, on this occasion, was the more remarkable, the madness of the wounded Ahaziah when the report of the awful event reached him, or the presumption of this officer and his soldiers. This second captain took no warning from what had befallen the first and his soldiers. Was the calamity which overtook them attributed to chance, to some lightning or fire-ball happening to consume them, or was he recklessly determined to brave things out? Like his predecessor he addressed the Prophet in the language of insulting derision, though using more peremptory terms than the former: "come down quickly." See once more how sin hardens the heart and ripens men for judgment. And who makes *you* to differ? Behold to what desperate lengths the writer and the reader had gone unless the mercy of God had interposed and stopped us in our mad career. O what praise is due unto sovereign grace which snatched me as a brand from the burning!

"And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God let fire come down from Heaven and consume thee and thy fifty" (v. 12). Proof had already been given that Jehovah was omniscient (v. 4), now they should know He is omnipotent. What is man in the hands of his Maker? One flash of lightning and fifty-one of His enemies become burnt stubble. And if all the hosts of Israel, yea the entire human race, had been assembled there, it had needed no other force. Then what folly it is for him whose breath is in his nostrils to contend with the Almighty: "woe unto him that striveth with his Maker" (Isa. 45:9). Some have blamed Elijah for destroying those men, overlooking the fact that *he* could no more bring down fire from Heaven than *they* can. Elijah simply announced on these occasions what God had Himself determined to do. Nor was it to please the Prophet that the Lord acted, or to gratify any vindictive passion in himself, but to show forth His power and justice. It cannot be said the soldiers were innocent, for they were performing no military duty, but openly fighting against Heaven—as the language of the third captain indicates. This has been recorded as a lasting warning for all ages—deliberately ignored by Romanists and others—that those who mock at and persecute God's faithful ministers will not escape His punishment. On the other hand, those who have befriended them shall by no means lose their reward.

"And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty" (2 Kings 1:13). What fearful obstinacy is there here! Deliberately hardening his heart Ahaziah strengthened himself against the Almighty and makes one more attempt to do the Prophet harm. Though on his death-bed, and knowing the Divine judgment which had befallen two companies of his soldiers (as v. 14 intimates), yet he persists in stretching forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed and exposes to destruction another of his captains with his body of men. So true are those words of Holy Writ, "though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him" (Prov. 27:22). And why is this? Because "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live" (Eccl. 9:3). In view of such unerring declarations, and with such examples of Pharaoh, Ahab and Ahaziah before us, we ought not to be the least surprised or startled by what we see and read of what is taking place in

the world today. Saddened and solemnized we should be, but not staggered and non-plussed.

“And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from Heaven and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight” (2 Kings 1:13, 14). This man was of a different disposition from the two who had preceded him: even in the military forces God has a remnant according to the election of grace. Daring not to attempt anything against Elijah, he employed humble submission and fervent entreaties, with every expression of respect. It was an affecting appeal, a real prayer. He attributed the death of the previous companies to its true cause and appears to have had an awful sense of the justice of God. He owns that their lives lay at the Prophet’s mercy and begs they may be spared. Thus did Jehovah provide not only for the security but also the honour of Elijah, as He did for Moses when Pharaoh had threatened to put him to death (Exo. 11:8). The appeal of this captain was not in vain. Our God is ever ready to forgive the humble suppliant, however rebellious he may have been, and the way to prevail with Him is to bow before Him.

“And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him” (2 Kings 1:15). This clearly demonstrates that Elijah waited for the Divine impulse and was entirely guided by it in the former instances of severity. Neither God nor His servant could have any pleasure in taking away the lives of those who approached them in a becoming manner. It was to punish them for their scorn and impiety that the others had been slain. But this captain came with fear and trembling, not with ill will to the Prophet nor contempt for his Master. Accordingly he found mercy and favour: not only were their lives preserved, but the captain succeeds in his errand—Elijah shall go with him to the king. Those who humble themselves shall be exalted, whereas those who exalt themselves shall be abased. Let us learn from Elijah’s example to deal kindly toward those who may have been employed against us, when they evidence their repentance and entreat our clemency. Mark it was “the angel of the LORD” who again addressed the Prophet: but what a test of his obedience and courage! The Tishbite had greatly exasperated Jezebel and her party, and now her reigning son must have been furious at him. Nevertheless he might safely venture into the presence of his raging foes seeing that the Lord had bidden him do so, with the assurance “be not afraid.” They could not move a finger against him without God’s permission. God’s people are quite safe in His hands and faith may ever appropriate the triumphant language of Psalm 27:1-3.

“And he arose and went down with him unto the king” (2 Kings 1:15), readily and boldly, not fearing his wrath. He made no objection and indicated no fear for his safety. Though the king was enraged and would be surrounded by numerous attendants, Elijah committed himself to the Lord and felt safe under His promise and protection. What a striking instance of the Prophet’s faith and obedience to God. But Elijah did not go to confront the king until bidden by the Lord to do so, teaching His servants not to act presumptuously by recklessly and needlessly exposing themselves unto danger: but as soon as He required it he promptly went, encouraging us to follow the leadings of Providence, trusting God in the way of duty and saying “The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me” (Heb. 13:6).

“And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD,” etc. (2 Kings 1:16). Elijah now repeats to the king, without any alteration, what he had said to his servants. Without fear or mincing the matter, the Prophet spoke God’s word plainly and faithfully to Ahaziah. In the name of Him in whose hands are both life and death he reproved the monarch for his sin and then pronounced sentence on him. What an awful message for him to receive: that he should go from his bed to Hell. Having discharged his commission, the Tishbite departed without molestation. Enraged as were Jezebel and her party, the king and his attendants, they were as meek as lambs and as silent as statues. The Prophet went in and out among them with perfect safety, receiving no more harm than Daniel when cast into the lions’ den, because he trusted in God. Let this cause us to go forth firmly but humbly in the discharge of our duty. “So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken” (v. 17).—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

5. *Its Springs.*

5. *The Irrepealable promises of God.* The "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4) which God has made to His people have been likened unto streams along which His covenant engagements run, for they all go back to and have their source in that Eternal Compact which He made with the elect in Christ. Their Surety undertook to do certain things for them and in return thereof God agreed that certain things should be bestowed upon them on whose behalf He transacted. What those things were that God stipulated to impart unto those Christ represented are revealed in the various promises which He has made unto them. Those promises are God's free and gracious dispensations or discoveries of His good will unto the elect in Christ in a Covenant of Grace. Therein, upon His veracity and faithfulness, He engages Himself to be their God, to give His Son unto them and for them, and His Spirit to abide with and in them, guaranteeing to supply everything that they need in order to make them acceptable before Him and to bring them all unto the everlasting enjoyment of Himself.

Those promises are free and gracious as to the rise or origin of them, being given to us merely by the good pleasure of God and not in return for anything demanded of us: that which is of promise is opposed to that which is in any way demanded or procured by us (Rom. 4:13, 14; Gal. 3:18). These promises are made unto us as *sinners*, and under no other qualification whatever, it being by sovereign mercy alone that any are delivered out of their fallen and depraved state. The promises are given unto them as shut up "under sin" (Gal. 3:22). These discoveries of God's goodwill are made known in Christ as the sole Medium of their accomplishment and as the alone procuring Cause of the good things contained in them. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea and *in Him* amen" (2 Cor. 1:20)—in and by Christ's mediation they have all their confirmation and certainty to us. The foundation of our assurance of their accomplishment is the character of their Maker: they are the engagements of Him "who cannot lie" (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:17, 18)—Heaven and earth shall pass away but His word shall endure forever.

The grand fountain-head promise from which all the others flow is that God will be "the God of His people" (Jer. 24:7; 31:33; Ezek. 11:20). In order that He may be "our God" two chief things are required. First, that all breaches and differences between Him and us shall be removed, perfect peace and agreement made and we rendered well-pleasing in His sight—sin must be put away and everlasting righteousness brought in. In order to this Christ acted as our Surety, our Priest, our Redeemer, and has become "our Peace" (Eph. 2:14), being of God "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). He "gave Himself for the Church, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church" (Eph. 5:25, 27). Second, that we might be kept meet for communion with Him as our God and for our eternal enjoyment of Him as our Portion. From this flows the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:33) that He would exercise unto us all the acts of His love and work in us that obedience which He required from and accepts of us in Jesus Christ, so preserving us unto Himself. This promise of the Spirit in the covenant is witnessed in Isaiah 59:21; Ezekiel 36:27, etc.

From the fountain-head promise that God will be our God in covenant relationship flow the two broad streams that He would give Christ *for* us and the Holy Spirit *to* us, and out from these two main streams issue a thousand rivulets for our refreshment! From

those two streams come forth all the blessings Christ has purchased for us and all the graces that the Holy Spirit produces in the elect, by the first of which they are made acceptable unto God and by the latter of which they have an enjoyment of Him. All the promises of mercy and forgiveness, faith and holiness, obedience and perseverance, joy and consolation, affliction and deliverance issue from them. Thus it follows that whoever has an interest in one promise has an interest in them all and in the fountain-head from which they flow. Have we a hold on any promise? that is by the Holy Spirit and from Him to Christ and then unto the bosom of the Father. Here also the most conditional of the promises are ultimately to be resolved into the absolute and unconditional love of God: He who promises to us life upon believing, works faith in us: "according as His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness": 2 Peter 1:3. (Most of the above is condensed from John Owen, the Puritan).

Let us cite a few of the particular promises wherein the Lord has engaged Himself to grant such supplies of His Spirit that we shall be supported against all opposition and preserved from such sins as would separate any of His saints from Him. "For the LORD loveth judgment and forsaketh not His saints: they are preserved forever" (Psa. 37:28). "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about His people from henceforth even forever" (Psa. 125:1, 2). "Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made and I will bear, even I will carry and deliver you" (Isa. 46:4). "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from them, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10). He "shall also confirm you unto the end" (1 Cor. 1:8). "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

The same Divine protection unto everlasting bliss is confirmed by many assertion passages as well as promissory ones. "Surely goodness and mercy *shall* follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psa. 23:6). "I am continually with thee. Thou hast holden me with Thy right hand: thou shall guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa. 73:23, 24). "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us" (1 John 2:19). God must forsake His integrity before He would abandon one of His people. But that cannot be: "faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil" (2 Thess. 3:3). They who affirm that any of God's children will perish are guilty of the fearful sin of *charging Him with perjury*.

6. *The gracious acts of God toward His People*. These are of such a nature as insure their everlasting salvation. In addition to His acts of electing them, making a sure covenant with His Son on their behalf and the putting of them into His hands with all grace and glory for them, we may mention the *adoption* of them into His family. This is an inestimable blessing, little understood today. It is a sonship-*in-law*, God bestowing upon His elect the legal status of sons. This is "by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5): since Christ is Son of God essentially and the elect are united to Him, they are the sons-in-law of God. Christ as God-man was set up as the Prototype and we are modeled after Him. As a woman becomes a man's daughter-in-law by his son's betrothing himself to her, so we

are sons-in-law unto God by an inalienable *legal* title—as the term “adoption” plainly signifies—by marriage union. It is by their relation to the Son of God that the elect are the sons of God. It is not by faith they become sons, rather does faith manifest them to be such.

“Because ye are sons (not to make us such) God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6). “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God” (1 John 3:1). From there flows all our dignities and honours: “if sons (Greek) then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Is Christ King and Priest? So also are we “kings and priests unto God and His Father” (Rev. 1:6). Is Christ Jehovah’s “Fellow” (Zech. 13:7)? So are we Christ’s “fellows” (Psa. 45:7). Is Christ God’s “Firstborn” (Psa. 89:27)? So we read of “The Church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23). Even now are we the sons of God, but “it doth not yet appear what we shall be,” it is not yet made manifest before the universe, “but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). And why are we so assured? Because “Whom God did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:30). Because God predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5)—by sovereign grace and not because of anything of ours—nothing can possibly sever or annul this wondrous relationship!

The *justification* of God’s people. This is also a legal act. It takes place in the supreme court of Heaven where God sits as the Judge of all the earth. The believing sinner is measured by the holy Law and pronounced righteous. Of old the question was asked, “But how shall man be just with God?” (Job 9:2), for the Law requires nothing less than perfect and perpetual obedience, and pronounces him accursed who continues not in all that it enjoins (Gal. 3:10). Had that question been left for solution to finite intelligence it had remained unsolved forever. How could God show mercy yet not abate one iota of what His justice requires? How could He treat with the guilty as though they were innocent? How could He righteously bestow the reward on those who merited it not? How could He pronounce righteous those who were unrighteous? Such a thing seems utterly impossible, nevertheless Divine omniscience has solved these problems—solved them without tarnishing His honour—yea unto His everlasting glory and to our everlasting admiration. It is the setting forth of this grand display of the Divine wisdom which constitutes the supreme blessedness of the Gospel.

According to the terms of the Everlasting Covenant Christ became the Sponsor of His people. “When the fullness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law” (Gal. 4:4). To the Law the incarnate Son rendered a complete and flawless obedience thereby magnifying and making it honourable (Isa. 42:21). The Divine dignity of His Person bestowed more honour on the Law by His obedience thereto than it had been dishonoured by all our manifold disobedience. Having perfectly fulfilled the Law, Christ then suffered its curse in His peoples’ stead, thereby blotting out their sins. That perfect obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account the moment we believe on Him, so that believers may say, “THE LORD *OUR* RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:6). On the ground of Christ’s righteousness legally becoming ours, God pronounces us justified (Rom. 3-24; 5-19, 2 Cor. 5:21). And therefore, because “God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:33, 34),

those justified by God can never be *unjustified*. The righteousness by which they are justified is an “everlasting” one (Dan. 9:24), the sentence of exoneration passed upon them in the high court of Heaven can never be revoked by man or devil. They have a title to everlasting glory and cannot come into condemnation!

7. *The death of Christ.* When Adam, the federal head as well as the father of the human race, apostatized, the elect equally with the non-elect fell in him and thus they are “by nature the children of wrath even as others” (Eph. 2:3). From that dreadful and direful state they are recovered by the mediation of Christ and the operation of the Spirit, the latter being a fruit of the former. We have briefly touched upon the mediation of Christ in the two preceding paragraphs, but as this is of such vital concern to our present theme, it requires to be considered in more detail. A large field is here opened before us, but we can now take only a brief glance at it. Once again we would point out that what we are about to advance can have little weight with Arminians who erroneously suppose that the mediatory work of Christ was general or universal in its character and design. But to those who have learned from Holy Writ that the redemption of Christ is definite and particular, a specific ransom for a specific people, there will be found here a sufficient answer to every accusation of Satan and an assurance which none of the tribulations of life can shake.

“Who is he that condemneth?” the Apostle asks. “It is Christ that died” is his triumphant reply (Rom. 8:34). The force of that reply turns upon the fact that Christ’s death is a substitutionary and atoning one. “For the transgression of My people was He stricken,” says God the Father (Isa. 53:8). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Jehovah laid upon Christ the iniquities of His people (Isa. 53:6) and then cried, “Awake O sword against My Shepherd and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts, smite the Shepherd” (Zech. 13:7). On the cross Christ rendered to God a full satisfaction for the sins of all those whom the Father gave to Him. Being a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God “to make propitiation (Greek) for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). Because Christ was made a curse for sin (Gal. 3:13) nothing but blessing is now our portion.

All for whom Christ died shall most certainly be saved, because He paid the full price of their redemption. As a surety stands in the place of the person he represents, the latter reaps the benefit of what the surety has done in his name, so that if his debt has been paid by the surety, the creditor can no more demand payment from him. Since Christ made full reparation to God’s Law, making complete atonement for the sins of His people, then it would be a flagrant violation of Divine justice if ever one of them should be punished for the same. Christ has purchased His people by His Precious blood, then can we suppose that God will suffer His most avowed enemy to rob His Son of any of them? Were that to happen, the Redeemer’s name would be rendered meaningless, for God Himself said, “thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He *shall save* His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Were that to happen, it could not be true that the Redeemer “shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

Since all the believer’s sins were laid upon Christ and atoned for, what is there that can possibly condemn him? And if there is nothing, how can he be cast into Hell? True,

none can reach Heaven without persevering in holiness but since the atonement of Christ possesses Divine virtue and is of everlasting efficacy, all for whom it was made must and shall persevere in holiness. God's wrath against His people was exhausted upon their Substitute: the black cloud of His vengeance was emptied at Calvary. "When I think of my sin it seems impossible that any atonement should ever be adequate. But when I think of Christ's death it seems impossible that any sin should ever need such an atonement as that. There is in the death of Christ enough and more than enough. There is not only a sea in which to drown our sins, but the very tops of the mountains of our guilt are covered" (C. H. Spurgeon). Therefore is God able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto Him by Christ (Heb. 7:25), yea, even though they have sinned as did Manasseh or Saul of Tarsus.

Christ has removed everything which could cause separation between God and His people. First, he has taken away the guilt of their sins, that it shall never prevail with the Lord to turn from them. Christ has "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12), for them: not a transient and unstable redemption, but an abiding and efficacious one. In consequence thereof God declares, "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). How could He do so, seeing that the Redeemer was to "make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:24)—as to the controversy of them between God and those for whom He dies. Christ has so satisfied God's justice and fulfilled His Law that no sentence of condemnation can be pronounced against them and therefore they must be infallibly saved. Second, as Christ removed that which along might turn God from believers, so He has annulled that which might cause them to depart from God: neither indwelling sin, Satan or the world can so prevail as to make them totally fall away. Christ has destroyed Satan's right to rule over them (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14), and He has abolished Satan's power by "binding" him (Matt. 12:29). Therefore are we assured "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14)—how could it since the Holy Spirit Himself indwells us?!

"Since Christ bore our sins, and was condemned in our place; since by His expiatory death the claims of Divine justice are answered, and the holiness of the Divine Law is maintained, who can condemn those for whom He died? O, what security is this for the believer in Jesus! Standing beneath the shadow of the Cross, the weakest saint can confront his deadliest foe; and every accusation alleged and every sentence of condemnation uttered he can meet by pointing to Him who died. In that one fact he sees the great debt cancelled, the entire curse removed, the grand indictment quashed and 'No condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus' written as in letters of living light upon the Cross" (O. Winslow).—A.W.P.

CHRISTIAN RESURRECTION.

Resuming at the point where we left off in last month, the Apostle next declares, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom. 6:9). First let us point out this opening "knowing that" clearly fixes the meaning of "knowing this" in verse 6 and shows that the commentators quite missed the point there. How, in what manner, do Christians know that death has no more dominion over Christ? Answer, solely by the testimony of God. It is not by virtue of any inward experience of which they are the subjects but by the infallible declarations of the Word of Truth. In like manner, it is by the witness of Holy Writ and by that alone, believers know their old man was crucified with Christ—that their standing in Adam then came to an end before God. "We *know* that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). Why is love for the brethren an infallible evidence and assurance of regeneration? Because God says so, because He declares it to be such.

"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom. 6:9). This is both unspeakably solemn and inexpressibly blessed. The inescapable implication of these words is that death once had "dominion over" Christ. He was its lawful captive because He took the place of His guilty people and bore their sins. But having received sin's wages in full, having completely discharged the awful debt of His people, the Law had no further claim upon Him—its penalty had been enforced, justice was satisfied. Christ can die no more: "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it *was not possible* that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24). A truly remarkable word is that: righteousness had been outraged if the sepulcher continued to hold the One who had earned a complete discharge from death's exactions. The object of His voluntary death having been accomplished, Christ lives forever more. How emphatically, then, does this verse intimate that Christ has "made an end of (the) sin" of His people (Dan. 9:24)!

"For in that He died, He died unto sin once but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (Rom. 6:10). This is explanatory of that which immediately precedes. Death derives its "dominion" from the reigning power or authority of sin, and when sin is destroyed its dominion ceases. Christ not only died "for sin" (Rom. 8:3) but "unto sin." Sin had "reigned unto death" (Rom. 5:21), and having put Himself in the place of sinners, Christ came under the legal sway or dominion of sin—the power which it derived from the Law. But by expiating sin Christ fully satisfied the Law and therefore the Law supplies no more "strength" to sin (1 Cor. 15:56) to reign over Him unto death. Such was the efficacy of His sacrifice that it need not be repeated (Heb. 7:27; 10:10), for by it He "finished transgression" (Dan. 9:24). The Law having no further penalty to inflict, Christ is forever beyond the reach of death. The death of Christ was the death of death as the wages of sin, not only for Himself as the mediator but for all those on whose behalf He transacted.

"In that He liveth, He liveth unto God." There are two separate things here, and unless we distinguish carefully between them we shall miss the principal point of this passage. "In that He liveth" concerns the judicial side of things—"He liveth unto God" the practical. The breaking of the Law involves death, the keeping of it *life*. The commandment was "unto life" (Rom. 7:10); "the man which doeth these things shall live by them" (10:5) was the original promise of the Law. The Divine Law is vested with sanctions: a penalty for disobedience, a *reward* for perfect obedience. Perhaps we can better grasp the force of these terms by remembering that the "death" and the "life"

which is the sentence of the Law, is first and foremost a *relationship*—a relationship to God involving a state of experience corresponding therewith. When Adam died he forfeited God's favourable regard and fell under His curse. When Christ had received the wages of sin, because He had previously rendered unto the Law a perfect obedience, He was entitled to God's favourable regard and worthy of His blessing. "In His *favour* is *life*" (Psa. 30:5)—the two things are inseparable.

When God raised our Surety from the dead it was not an act of grace or mercy unto Him but one of bare *justice*, such as the Law required. "Righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 10:2) and Christ was the Righteous One. Concerning Him it is written, "He asked life of Thee" and the Father gave Him, "length of days, forever and ever" (Psa. 21:4). He Himself declared, "I have set the LORD always before Me . . . therefore My heart is glad . . . My flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show Me the path of life" (Psa. 16:8-11). When Christ asks it is not for a favour, but a suing of His legitimate right. "Ask of Me," says God, "and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psa. 2:8)—because He had *purchased* them. "Father I *will* (not "request") that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am" (John 17:24)—because such is His *due*. Thus it was when He asked for "life."

"He liveth" (Rom. 6:10). Is that a reference to the reunion of spirit and soul and body in the person of Christ and His emerging from the sepulcher? No, rather does it contemplate the cause and ground thereof. The grave could not retain the One upon whom the Law announced the reward of "life." Or, to express the same idea in more personal yet equivalent terms, the Father could not leave in the disembodied (and so, imperfect) state, the One on whom He now looked with complacency. Christ had gloriously overcome sin and death: not only so, He had magnified the Law and made it honourable by His obedience to it. Therefore God was honour-bound to own Him as His righteous Servant. As such He was entitled to and become possessed of a life forever beyond the reach of sin and death. That "life" of Christ is "eternal life" because it is based on and is the reward of the "everlasting righteousness" which He brought in (Dan. 9:24). Life (instated to the approbation of God) is as truly the reward of righteousness as death (the judicial disapprobation of God) is the penalty of sin. "He liveth unto God" is the consequence of the former.

"In that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (Rom. 6:10). This is predicated of Christ not as a private person, but as the Head of His people. It was as their Representative He had satisfied both the precept and the penalty of the Law. And representation involves *identification*: if the One acted on behalf of the many, it is equally true that the many acted in the One. Christ and the Church together form one body and God never views the one apart from the other. Accordingly we read, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us *together* with Christ" (Eph. 2:4, 5). The reference there is not to regeneration (though it involves and requires it), for it is not an individual experience (as the new birth is) but a *corporate* transaction which is in view. The following words prove this: "and hath raised us up *together* and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ" (v. 6). The life to which the Law pronounced Christ entitled is also conferred upon all His people.

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). “Likewise”: just as Christ died unto sin—unto its penalty—and now lives unto God in the enjoyment of the Law’s reward, so regard yourselves as participants of the same. “Reckon ye”: what is true in itself, make true in your convictions and consciousness. “Reckon” does not mean “suppose” or “fancy yourselves” to be something you are not. It is not try and persuade yourselves to be “dead indeed unto sin,” but because God declares you *are* so, set to your seal that He is true—receive His testimony without doubting. In Romans 2:26 the word for “reckon” is rendered “counted,” that is, “accounted.” In 3:28 “conclude” and in 2:3 “thinkest.” Christians are to think of themselves as God has described them in His Word, namely, as *one with Christ*, as the actual participants of His death and of His life; to conclude themselves to be what God affirms they are.

In point of truth Christians are partakers legally of Christ’s death and life and therefore they should so regard themselves: this is not a fiction but a *fact*. They are therefore enjoined to look upon themselves as God sees them: forever freed from the penalty and doom of sin, entitled to and possessors of the Law’s reward. When Abram was bidden to offer up his beloved Isaac, he obeyed, “*accounting* that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19): the word for “reckon” in Romans 6:11 is here rendered “accounting,” and it was a true accounting. Believers are “dead to sin,” not to its power, not to its activities within them but to its guilt and wages. They are so because in the Person of their Substitute they have already borne and exhausted its penalty. Furthermore, they live in Christ and stand before God in all His acceptableness. In God’s sight they are completely justified, spotlessly righteous. In God’s reckoning they have passed out of death into the realm of life and *faith* is to lay hold of God’s testimony thereto.

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God in Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:11). Here is the *initial resurrection*, the foundation of the spiritual (regeneration) and the bodily. And it is one of which we are to enjoy the blessedness and comfort even now. This verse is in the form of a positive command. It is the Christian’s duty as well as privilege to be fully assured of his identification with and participation in all that Christ is and has done. This is not a matter of feeling but of faith. It is the will of God that His children should be convinced of their interest in Christ and perfect standing before Him. So far from its being presumptuous for them to do so, it is rank *disobedience* not to! And this command is binding upon all believers alike. This injunction to “reckon,” to believe and account, is not made only unto those of strong faith and deep experience, but to babes in Christ equally as to full-grown Christians. We are to view ourselves as *God* sees us—dead to sin, alive unto Him in Christ.

Now Christians are not only to reckon themselves to be what God declares they are as to their standing or status before Him but are to regulate their lives and order their conduct accordingly. Hence we find the Apostle immediately adds, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead” (vv. 12, 13). That exhortation is founded upon and flows from all that has been before us. The doctrinal *fact* is we died to sin in Christ; the practical *lesson* is, live not in subjection to the sin which slew Him. Legal union with Christ calls for practical holiness, His wondrous love supplying the motive power. Live

agreeably to the good news announced by the Gospel. Let your behaviour correspond to your standing. Christians “*are* alive unto God,” then let them abandon all which characterized them in their unregenerate state. Let your judicial identification with Christ furnish the motive for practical conformity to Him. Since you are “alive unto God,” do all you do for His glory.

A similar exhortation, based upon the same doctrinal fact, is found in Colossians 3:1-5. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (v. 1). A better rendering would be, “Since then ye were raised with Christ.” The “if” of the A.V. is not designed to express a doubt, but draws an inference. Because the Colossian saints *were* raised with their Surety: upon that is based the “seek those things which are above.” It is the same form of speech as when it is said, “If you are citizens of the country, you ought to obey the laws of the country.” No doubt or uncertainty is expressed, any more than in the “if” of John 14:3. Since, then, you were raised with Christ: that is, when He was raised, His resurrection as the Head of His Church being virtually the resurrection of all His people.

That the resurrection here referred to cannot be a *moral* one—a raising of the thoughts, desires and affections of believers—is evident from the exhortation which follows. The Apostle would not say, since then you are heavenly minded, be heavenly minded, but since you were really raised with Christ, then live accordingly. “Seek those things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1)—if you are united to Him, it becomes you to be tending to Him—and He is in Heaven, and not upon earth. “For,” continues the Apostle, “ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.” It is to be regretted that the present tense “ye are dead” is found in our version, for it not only contradicts the previous verse but hides from the reader the scope and meaning of the whole passage. They “died” when Christ died, as they rose with Him, and now their life is hidden with Him in God, to be openly manifested one day for, “When He who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (v. 4).

Thus continual and eternal is the believer’s union with the Lord. He is so joined to Christ, so truly a member of His body both legally and vitally, that what is true of Christ is true of him also. The whole merit and virtue of Christ’s work passes over to him as his present and rightful heritage. The Lord Jesus has passed through death and resurrection in triumph to the skies and His triumph is equally the triumph of His people. The anchor of the soul which is the security of the saints “entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is *for us* entered, even Jesus” (Heb. 6:19, 20). Christ has entered Heaven in our name, on our behalf. One by one His purchased people are passing there and when they are all gathered then shall the opened heavens reveal their oneness with Christ. What a glorious consummation to His work—the Bridegroom and the Bride one in heavenly glory! This is a future thing in actuality but faith makes it present and real. It is faith which regards our union with Christ in His death and resurrection as effectually our own.

In Romans, as we have seen, the death of Christ is presented as the Christian’s death unto *sin*, but in Colossians 3 that death is seen separating him from the *world*. Christ tabernacled on earth but at the grave His earthly life ended. He passed through death and resurrection away from this terrestrial sphere into a new and heavenly country where He now lives and reigns. The earth as well as its inhabitants lie under the curse. The world is a Divinely condemned place. Christ could not stay here and His people cannot. They have been delivered “from this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4) as well as from their sins.

Even now their “conversation (citizenship) is in Heaven” (Phil. 3:20) and Heaven is their Home. The more faith lays hold of that fact, the more will they realize that they are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11) in this scene. And the more their affections are set upon things above, the more of Heaven will they enjoy in their souls and not only will the Holy Spirit be witnessing with their spirit—that they are sons of God—but He will grant them increased earnestness and foretastes of heavenly blessedness.

Here, then, is the real secret of heavenly-mindedness: not through a forced aversion from the world while we are yet in love with it, not by the power of ecclesiastical vows or monastic mortifications, nor the proud rigour of the Pharisee or the sulky seclusion of the ascetic, but by *faith*—by a faith which has attained to heavenly things and which drops the earthly because they are so poor and perishing. It is life drawing us away from death, riches from poverty, celestial rest and blessing from worldly confusion and disorder. “This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). It has always been so. It was so with the early Christians in their bitter persecution: “ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have *in Heaven* a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). It was so when the Puritans scorned the honors and wealth of this world. It is so still. Why covet material riches when God is saying to us, All things in Christ are yours? Why lust after mundane dignity when called by God His *sons*, made His kings and priests forevermore? Every reason have we to set our affection upon things above.

Thus we see again the true relation of sound doctrine and godly practice—the effect which the former should produce upon the latter—and which it does produce when “mixed with *faith*.” Where doctrine is only received intellectually it has no influence on the life, but when laid hold of by a living faith it acts as a powerful dynamic upon the affections and issues in a godly walk.—A.W.P.

