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STUDIES
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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

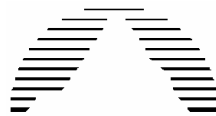
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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SERVANTS OF GOD

The Christian bears a twofold fundamental relationship to God: he is a “son” and he is a “servant”—the one speaks of privilege, the other expresses his duty. The one complements the other, and we should preserve a balance in our thinking upon them. The Christian was made a son; he made himself a servant. He was a son from all eternity in the purpose of God, he became so actually at his regeneration. He was an enemy by nature and practice, but at conversion, he renounced the service of sin and Satan and took upon him the yoke of Christ, to henceforth own Him as his alone Lord and Master. Thus, we become God’s servants by free contract, by a voluntary act of our own, by “giving ourselves” unto the Lord (2Co 8:11, 12), to be controlled and directed by Him, to live now so as to honour and please Him in all things. Such unre-served dedication of ourselves unto God is our “reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). It is due God as His creatures, for He made us. It is due Him as our Preserver and Provider, for we are dependent on Him for every breath that we draw. It is due Him by right of redemption, for the Christian is not his own—free to please himself—but has been bought with a price (1Co 6:19, 20): he is the purchased property of Christ.

God’s rights over us are unmistakable and absolute, but He will have them acknowledged by our own consent; and therefore, we only become His servants professedly and truly when we yield ourselves “unto God, as those that are alive from the dead,” and our members (of both soul and body) “as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13), which was done at conversion, when we disowned sin, recognised the high claims of Christ, and received Him as our Lord and Master. Henceforth, we carry ourselves as His “servants” just in proportion as we live under a sense of our surrender to and dedication of ourselves to Him; or in other words, just so far as we now make the performing of His revealed will and the giving of pleasure to Him the chief business of our lives, for a “servant” is one at the command of his master. The motive-springs of such service is gratitude unto Him for as He died and suffered for us, with a realisation of the obligations this imposed upon us—for He will only be served out of *love*. “What doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deu 10:12).

God has joined these two things inseparably together: “Them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exo 20:6). The Lord Jesus enforced the same truth: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). “Ye are my friends [all others are His enemies], if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). But Christ did more: He *exemplified* this truth in His own blessed person and perfect life: He voluntarily “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7) and manifested His entire subjection to God by becoming “obedient” to Him: an obedience without any reserve or limit, for He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8). Thus, a “servant” is known chiefly by his *obedience*: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are” (Rom 6:16). Of Christ the Father declared, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1). And why did the Father find such “delight” in Him? Because He loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Psa 45:7), because He could say “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). And it is only as the Christian conducts himself as an *obedient* “servant” that he has fellowship with Christ, follows the example He has left him, and gives his Redeemer “delight.”

“For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:55). Mark it well, my reader: it was not only Moses and Aaron, or even the priests and Levites who were His “servants,” but *all* the Israelites who had been redeemed from the house of bondage; and they were “servants” because He was the Lord their God. “Lord” and “servant” are correlative terms, as are husband and wife, parent and child. This holds good in the N.T. era as truly and fully as it did in the Old: all who have been genuinely converted and brought to receive Christ as their Lord are His servants. This was foretold of old: “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, *to serve him*, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants” (Isa 56:6). “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:6). “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). “Not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1Pe 2:16). Even in Heaven, the saints shall still sustain this relationship and character: “His servants shall serve him” (Rev 22:3).

We have designedly added passage to passage in the last paragraph, because in some religious circles a “servant of Christ” is limited unto a minister of the Gospel, while in other sections of Christendom, “Chris-

tian service” is restricted to certain special activities which only a small number engage in—such as a Sunday School Class, tract distributing, speaking in the open air, engaging in “personal work.” Thus, it is implied and actually believed by many that one may be a real Christian, and yet, not a “servant” of Christ at all. That is indeed a serious misconception, yea, a fatal delusion. It is indeed true that one may be a real Christian without engaging in any of the forms of “service” just mentioned, for they were quite unknown two centuries ago! But in the sense we have pointed out in the preceding paragraphs, unless I am consciously and conscientiously serving the Lord, then I am not a Christian at all. Lip patronage will not satisfy Christ, nor will the performing of tasks to which He has never called us. We must do the things *He* has commanded, render obedience to Him out of love, make it our constant concern to glorify Him, or we are not His servants, but rather the servants of our lusts and the bond slaves of Satan.

What an inestimable privilege, what a high honour to be the servants of the Lord of glory! “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee and that hear thy wisdom” (1Ki 10:8) exclaimed the queen of Sheba as she beheld those who waited upon Solomon. But one infinitely greater than Solomon is our Master, even Immanuel. He is no hard taskmaster (like the Egyptians) demanding that we make bricks without providing us with straw. No, His yoke is easy and His burden light (Mat 11:30). It is a blessed thing to serve Him, and His service is freedom—the only genuine freedom there is. The service of Satan is captivity (2Ti 2:26), for though he and his emissaries may declare it is and promise us “liberty,” yet all who heed his lies are “brought in bondage” (2Pe 2:19)—for the service of sin is drudgery, slavery, tyranny. Not only is Christ’s service honourable and blessed, but it is richly recompensed both now and hereafter: “If any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (Joh 12:26) with peace of conscience, contentment of mind, joy of heart. And in the day of rewards, He shall say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat 25:21).

A few words now upon the spirit and character of our service: 1) *It must be in “newness of spirit”* (Rom 7:6), for that which proceeds from the flesh is “dead works” (Rom 7:5). Our serving God is to express the new relation into which His wondrous grace has brought us and issue from the enablement of the new power He has communicated to us—the indwelling Holy Spirit. 2) *It must be rendered from love.* It was so with the Lord of glory: “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31). In like manner, according to their much lower stature, it is said of His servants, “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2Co 5:14). 3) *It must be with cheerfulness:* “Serve the LORD with gladness” (Psa 100:2), whether it be in the kitchen or in the workshop. As Spurgeon says, “He is our Lord, and therefore He is to be served: He is our gracious Lord, and therefore to be served with joy.” 4) *It must be in a spirit of filial fear,* owning the Lord’s authority over us, venerating His majesty. Nehemiah prayed that the ear of the Lord might be attentive to the “prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name” (Neh 1:11) and David could say, “Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear” (Psa 119:38), while of the perfect Servant, it is recorded that He “was heard in that he feared” (Heb 5:7). 5) *With serenity of mind,* and not in a slavish spirit of dread, either of God or man. “That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear [of His despising our poor efforts if they be sincere, or of the consequences from our fellows], In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74, 75). 6) *Without partiality:* no license is given us to pick and choose—“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (Joh 2:5, compare Mat 28:20). 7) *Dependently:* Definitely, earnestly, daily waiting upon Him for enabling wisdom and strength: see Hebrews 12:28 and 4:16. —A.W.P.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

10. 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5

The communication of news in ancient times was a much slower business than it is today. How long an interval elapsed between Paul's sending of his first epistle to the Corinthian church and his obtaining tidings from them we cannot be sure, but probably at least a year passed before he learned how they had received his communication and what effects, under God, it had produced in them. During that suspense, he appears to have been in a state of unusual depression and anxiety. The fierce opposition he encountered in Asia, where he was "pressed out of measure" (2Co 1:8) and the deep concern which he had for them, affected his peace of mind (2Co 7:5). His first epistle had been sent from Ephesus, where he had expected to remain until the following Pentecost (1Co 16:8), evidently hoping by then to hear from them. From Ephesus, he proposed to pass unto Macedonia and from thence to Corinth (1Co 16:5-7). But desiring to learn what had been their reactions to his letter, before he came to them, he sent Timothy (1Co 4:17; 16:10), commissioning him to set things in order and bidding them to respond peacefully to his counsels.

A little later on, the apostle sent Titus to Corinth in order to ascertain how matters were progressing, with instruction to return and make a report unto himself, for the manner and measure in which they had responded to his exhortations would regulate to a considerable extent his future movements. A momentous issue was at stake: the interests of the Gospel in an important city, the prosperity of a church which he had planted, and the honour of his Master's name were involved. Deeply exercised, he had left Ephesus and come unto Troas on his way to Macedonia, where it seems he had arranged for Titus to meet him and make his report. But in this he was disappointed (2Co 2:13), and having no rest in his spirit, he pressed forward to Macedonia. There too, peace was denied him, for "he had no rest," being troubled on every side—"without were fightings, within were fears" (2Co 7:5). Then it was that God relieved his suspense by the arrival of the eagerly-awaited Titus, who brought him a most favourable report, assuring him that his epistle had accomplished most of what he desired (2Co 7:6-16); and thereby, the heart of the apostle was greatly comforted.

Learning that the Corinthians had received his admonitions in Christian meekness, that they had been brought to repentance and had dis-fellowshipped the incestuous person (2Co 7:9; 2:6), and that the major portion of the assembly had expressed the warmest affection for him (2Co 1:14; 7:7), he at once sent this second epistle to them. The news brought by Titus not only greatly relieved his mind, but also filled him with gratitude to God. On the other hand, the boldness and influence of the false teachers there had increased, as had their charges against himself, and their determined efforts to undermine his apostolic authority (2Co 10:2; 11:2-6, 12-15), moved him to indignation. This it is which explains the sudden change from one subject to another and the noticeable variation of tone in this second epistle. To the obedient section of the church, Paul wrote in the tenderest affection, commending their penitence, assuring them he had forgiven and forgotten. But when he turns to the corrupters of the Truth among them, he strikes a note of severity which is not heard elsewhere in his epistles.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [for the Greek is the same as in Ephesians 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:3, and the three passages are uniformly so translated in the Revised Version], the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2Co 1:3). This is an ascription of praise, for "Blessed be" signifies "Adored be." The Father is here adored under a threefold appellation, each of which views Him as related to us in Christ—that is, to Christ as the covenant Head and His elect in Him. As the first will come before us again in Ephesians 1:3, we reserve our remarks upon it until we come (D.V.¹) to that verse. The three titles are most intimately related, the one depending upon the other. He "the Father of mercies" unto His people, because He is the God and Father of their Head; and because He is "the Father of mercies" unto them, He is also their "God of all comfort." This threefold designation is worthy of our devoutest and closest meditation. "I do not know of anything more conducive to a wholesome spiritual edification than an acquaintance with God in the titles by which He has been pleased to reveal Himself to His people in His blessed Book. It is thus He delights to communicate His comforts and consolations to their exercised hearts" (T. Bradbury, 1830).

¹ D.V.: Deo Volenti, Latin, "as God wills."

“The Father of mercies.” Though it be blessedly true that God is “plenteous in mercy” (Psa 86:5), yet this title conveys more than the idea that He is our most merciful Father: it also connotes that these mercies issue from His very nature and that they are therefore both His offspring and His delight. The Hebrews used the word “father” for the author or first cause of anything, as Jabal is termed “the father of such as dwell in tents” and Jubal as “the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” (Gen 4:20, 21)—that is, the originator or founder of such. For the same reason God is called “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9), because He is the Begetter of them. In James 1:17, He is designated “the Father of lights,” as He is the Author of all gifts coming down to us from above. There is a manifest allusion there to the sun which is the author and giver of light unto all the planets, and may therefore be termed the “father” or first original of light unto the earth. God is appropriately termed, “the Father of mercies”—for but for Him none of our mercies would have any existence. He sustains the same relation to His “mercies” as a father does to his dear children.

There is thus at least a threefold reason why God is here styled, “the Father of mercies.” First, it is as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” that He is such unto us: thus, it is *covenant* mercies which are here in view. Second, to signify that He is so far from begrudging these unto us that “mercies” are regarded as the Father’s offspring, as proceeding from His nature; and therefore, are His *delights* (Mic 7:18). Third, because of its pertinency to the case of the Corinthians. It was His mercy which had moved the apostle to deal so faithfully with them in his first letter, for little as we may realise it, and still less as we may prize it, it is a great mercy when we are rebuked for our faults—instead of being abandoned by God. It was a further signal mercy, which caused the Corinthians to be convicted by Paul’s rebukes, for the most faithful admonitions are ignored by us, unless God is pleased to sanctify them unto us: only in His light can we see ourselves. It was an additional mercy which wrought in them a godly sorrow, which caused them to mourn for their sins and put right what was wrong, for it is the goodness of God which leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4).

“And the God of all comfort.” This is an excellency peculiar to the true and living God. None of the false gods of heathendom have such a quality ascribed to them; rather are they represented as being cruel and ferocious, and consequently, they are regarded—even by their worshippers—as objects of dread. But how different is the Lord God: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (Isa 66:13) He declared. What a revelation of the Divine character is that! Though inconceivable in majesty, all-mighty in power, inflexible in justice, yet he is also infinite in tenderness. How this should draw out our love for Him. How freely should we seek unto Him for relief in times of stress and sorrow. But alas, how slow most of us are in turning to God for consolation; how readily and eagerly do we seek unto the creature for the assuaging of our grief. Many believers seem to be as reluctant to go out of themselves to God alone for comfort, as unbelievers are to go out of themselves to Christ alone for righteousness. Yea, are there not some who, in a petulant and rebellious mood, say by their actions, “my soul refused to be comforted” (Psa 77:2)—despising their own mercies.

“The God of all *comfort*.” That term has come to have a narrower meaning than its derivatives, connoting little more today than consolation or soothing. Our English word is formed from the Latin *can fortis*, “with strength.” Divine comfort is the effect produced by His “mercies.” Every genuine comfort is here traced back to its source: He is “the God of *all* comfort” (2Co 1:3). In its lower sense, “comfort” is the natural refreshment that we obtain, under God, from the creature: we say “under God”—for apart from *His* blessing of them to us, we can derive no enjoyment and no benefit even from temporal mercies. In its higher signification, “comfort” has reference to support under trials. It is a Divine strengthening of the mind when there is a danger of our being overwhelmed by fear or sorrow. “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath *quickened* me” (Psa 119:50). Blessed is it to remember how often the Holy Spirit is termed, in relation to God’s people, “The Comforter.” Sometimes He makes use of our fellow-Christians to administer a spiritual cordial to our fainting hearts, as Paul was comforted by the coming of Titus to him (2Co 7:6).

It is inexpressibly solemn to consider that it was in precisely these characters of “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” that Christ was *deserted by Him*. It was as our Surety and not as His beloved Son (regarded such) that the Judge of all the earth dealt with Him in holy severity and exorable justice, crying, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7). This is why that, amid all the indignities and inhumanities inflicted upon Him by *men*, He “opened not His mouth” (Isa 53:7); but when the Father of mercy withdrew from Him the light of His countenance and His comforts were withheld, He broke forth into that mournful lam-

entation, "My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" And it is just because God sustained not the characters to the Saviour on the cross, that He bears these relations to us. If it ever be remembered by us that our cup is sweet because His was bitter, then God communes with us, because He forsook Christ—that we are enlightened, because He passed through those fearful hours of darkness.

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2Co 1:4). The immediate reference is to the experiences through which the apostle had recently passed. He had occasion to personally adore God as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2Co 1:3), since he had been proving Him as such, for He had comforted *him* in all his trouble. Yet, he graciously and tenderly associates the Corinthians with himself, for they too had sorrowed and been comforted (2Co 7:9, 13). How striking is the difference between these verses and those which occupied us on the last occasion. Then the apostle could only thank God for their endowments (1Co 1:4-7), for he could not rejoice in their condition; but now he adores Him for the grace which makes all things work together for good unto His own and causes their very troubles to issue in their profit. There he had termed the One addressed "not God," but here it is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" who he adored. Only as we pass through the fires, do we obtain a fuller experimental knowledge of God and become more intimately acquainted with Him.

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." The soul is more capable receiving Divine comfort at such a season, for the things of time and sense that cease to charm it. Moreover, the Lord manifests more tenderness to His people on such occasions: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1Pe 4:14). God has various designs in bringing His people into trouble and sustaining them under it: for their growth, for a fuller discovery of Himself to them, for them to learn the sufficiency of His grace.

But another reason is here alluded to: "That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2Cor 1:4). The favours which He bestows upon us are intended to be made useful unto others. If I have found the Lord "a very present help in trouble" (Psa 46:1), it is both my privilege and duty to witness unto my troubled brethren as to *how* I was enabled to overcome temptations, found the Divine promises in support, and obtained peace in Christ while in the midst of tribulation. The best place of training for the pastor is not a seminary, but the school of adversity; spiritual lessons can only be learned in the furnace of affliction.

This principle receives its highest exemplification in the person of a blessed Redeemer. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). It is clear from those words that in order to the perfecting of character to serve in that office, He must know first hand what actual trial and sorrow are. The "merciful" here signifies to lay to heart the miseries of His people, and to care for them so as to sustain and relieve their distresses. Yet it is not His mercifulness in general which is in view (for He possessed that both as God and man), but rather that which is drawn forth by the memory of the temptations and sufferings through which He passed. It is the exercise of mercifulness and faithfulness in His priestly work on high as excited and called into exercise by a sense of the afflictions He experienced on earth to which the apostle refers. Not only "merciful," but "faithful" also, in His constant care and attention to the needs of His weak and weeping people here below. Filled with compassion toward them, He is ever ready to support and sustain, strengthen and cheer them.

"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb 2:18). Having trod the same path as His suffering people, He is qualified to enter into their afflictions. He is not like the holy angels who never experienced poverty or pain. No, during the season of His humiliation, He knew what weakness and exhaustion were (Joh 4:6), what the hatred and persecution of enemies entailed, what it was to be misunderstood and then deserted by those nearest to Him. Then how well fitted is He to sympathise with His suffering Church! Ponder such a passage as Psalm 69:1-4 and then ask yourself, Is not the One who passed through such trials capacitated to enter into the exercises of His tried people? "The remembrance of *His own* sorrows and temptations makes Him mindful of the trials of His people, and ready to help them" (M. Henry). The same heart beats within the Lord Jesus today as when He shared the grief of Mary and Martha by the grave of Lazarus, for His sympathies have not been impaired by His exaltation to heaven (Heb 13:8). O what a Saviour is ours: the all-mighty God, the all-tender Man!

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Christ's being "tempted" must not be re-

stricted to the evil solicitations of Satan. It includes the whole of His condition, circumstances, and course during the days of His flesh, when He suffered the pangs of hunger, had not where to lay His head, encountered reproach and shame, endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Thereby, He was prepared for the further discharge of His priestly office, fitted to be affected with a sense of our weakness, and to suffer with us. Though so high above us, He is yet one with us in everything except our sins, and concerning them also, He is our Advocate with the Father. We too are tempted (tried) in many ways, but there is One who consoles with us, yea, who is afflicted in all our afflictions and who helpeth our infirmities. But in remembering this, forget not that *He* had to cry, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found *none*" (Psa 69:20).

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2Co 1:4). One can enter more fully and closely into the grief of another if he has passed through identical circumstances. The Israelites were reminded of this when the Lord said, "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye *know the heart of a stranger*, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exo 23:9). Thus it was with the apostle Paul. God's design in so afflicting him was that he might be the better qualified to minister unto other afflicted souls. For an outline of his afflictions, see 2 Corinthians 11:24-30; yet so wondrous had God sustained him, he said, "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation" (2Co 7:4). God comforts by stilling the tumult of our mind, by assuaging the grief of our heart, and by filling the soul with peace and joy believing; and this, that we may be the comforters of others. Are some of us experiencing *less* of His consolations now, because in the past, we failed to seek out the sorrowing and cheer them?

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2Co 1:5). The Christian must expect sufferings in the world, and such sufferings as non-Christians are free from. Faithfulness in Christ instead of exempting him from the same will rather intensify them. This is not always pointed out by preachers. It is true there is peace and joy to those who take Christ's yoke upon them, and such peace and joy as the worldling knows nothing of; yet it is also true that each one who enlists under His banner will be called upon to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2Ti 2:3), and that they "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). Therefore, it is but honest and right that the recruiting-sergeants of the Gospel should bid those who are contemplating taking upon them a Christian profession to "sitteth...down first, and counteth the cost" (Luk 14:28, 31) and faithfully warn them that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Ti 3:12). To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and those properly forearmed will *not* think it "strange" when the "fiery trial" comes upon them (1Pe 4:12).

Verse 5 supplies a confirmation of the preceding one, its force being: we *are* able to comfort others *for* our consolation is equal to our sufferings. In particular afflictions to which the apostle here alluded, are termed "the sufferings of Christ," because they are the same in kind (though rarely if ever so in degree) as He experienced at the hands of men, and because of our union with Him and in order to be conformed to His image, we are required (in our measure) to have "fellowship" (Phi 3:10) therein. They are also termed, "the sufferings of Christ," because they are what His followers willingly endure for his sake" (Phi 1:29): since He is despised and rejected of the world, if we go forth unto Him without the camp, it must inevitably entail "bearing reproach" (Heb 13:13). It may be well to point out that some Christians through their folly, fanaticism, haughtiness, and other things—bring upon themselves needless suffering, but Christ gets not glory from them. But it is more necessary in this day to warn His people against a temporizing and compromising spirit, which seeks to *escape* "the sufferings of Christ" "at the price of unfaithfulness to Him.

"So our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Here is rich compensation. As union with Christ is the source and cause of the "sufferings," so it is of "consolation" (Joh 16:33)—as it will be of our glorification (Rom 8:17, 30; 2Ti 2:12. This it is which makes and marks the great difference between believers and unbelievers. Alienation from Christ does not exempt from suffering, but it cuts off from the only source of real consolation; and there, "the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2Co 7:10). There is a due proportion between the sufferings and the consolation, and if we would experience more of the latter, we must have more of the former, and for that, we must respond more faithfully to the light He has given us. God regulates the supply according to the trial and suits His dispensations unto our needs. The more the world frowns on us, the more His smile is enjoyed by us. If material effects be taken away, He supplies spiritual ones. If our bodies be cast into prison, our souls will enjoy more of Heaven. He graciously provides a sweetening tree for every Marah (Exo 15:23). —A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

22. Fourteenth Miracle

First, *its connection*. That which engaged our attention on the last occasion grew out of the determination of Benhadad to again wage war on Israel. After taking counsel with his servants, the Syrian laid an ambush for the king of Israel, but they had reckoned without Jehovah. He revealed to His servant the prophet the danger menacing his royal master, and accordingly, he went and acquainted him with the same, who, attending to the warning, was delivered from the trap set for him. The heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled at this thwarting of his design, and suspecting a traitor in his own camp made inquiry. Whereupon one of his attendants informed him that nothing could be concealed from the prophet that was in Israel, and that *he* had put the intended victim on his guard. After sending out spies to discover the whereabouts of Elisha and learning that he was in Dothan, the king of Syria sent a formidable force, consisting of "horses and chariots" and a "great host" of footmen to take him captive, determining to remove this obstacle from his path.

The miracle we are about to consider is a *double* one, and strictly speaking, comprises the fourteenth and fifteenth of the series connected with our prophet. But the record is so brief and the two miracles are so closely related that they scarcely admit of separate treatment, and therefore, instead of taking them singly we propose to consider them conjointly, viewing the second as the counterpart or complement of the former. It is a miracle which stands out from the last one which occupied our notice. That concerned the opening of eyes; this, the closing of them. There but a single person was involved; here, a great host of men were concerned. In the one, it was the prophet's own servant who was the subject of it; here, it was the soldiers who have been sent to take him captive. In the former, he wrought in response to an urgent appeal from his attendant; in the other, he acted without any solicitation. They both occurred at the same place. They were both wrought in answer to Elisha's prayer. They are both recorded for our learning and comfort.

In connection with the preceding miracle, Elisha had prayed to his Master for Him to open the eyes of his servant, and we are told, "And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2Ki 6:17). That the prophet himself already saw this celestial convoy is clear: it was his own vision of them which moved him to ask that his servitor might also behold them. We may deduce the same from the immediate sequel. So far from being in a panic at the great host of Syrians, which had come to take him captive, Elisha calmly stood his ground. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1), for since God be for them, who can be against them? There was no need for him to cry unto the Lord for deliverance, for Divine protection was present to his view. Therefore, he quietly waited till the enemy actually reached him before he acted.

Ere passing on, let us offer a further remark upon this celestial guard which was round about Elisha. That it was composed of personal beings is clear from the pronoun, "*they* that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2Ki 6:16). That they were angelic beings is evident from several passages: "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (Psa 104:4). At His second advent, we are told "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" (2Th 1:7, 8). The ministry of angels is admittedly a mysterious subject, one about which we know nothing, save what it hath pleased God to reveal to us. Yet it is a subject which holds by no means an inconspicuous place in Holy Writ. It would be outside our present scope to explore it at large; rather, must we confine ours to that aspect of it which is here presented unto us.

Angels are not only God's messengers sent on missions of mercy, but they are also His soldiers, commissioned both to guard His people, and execute judgment on His enemies. They are designated, "the heavenly *host*" (1Ki 22:19; Luk 2:13)—the Greek word meaning "soldiers"—or as we would term them, "men of war," the militia of Heaven. In full accord with that conclusion, we find the Saviour reminding His disciples that "more than twelve legions of angels" (Mat 26:53) were at His disposal, should He but ask the Father for protection against the armed rabble that had come to arrest Him. It was a host of them, in the form of fiery horses and chariots (compare Psalm 68:17) who here encamped around Elisha, ready to fight for him. How mighty the angels are, we know: one, called "the destroyer" (Exo 12:23, compare 2Sa 24:16) slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, while another slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians

in a night (2Ki 19:35). That their operations continue in this Christian era is plain from such passages as Act 12:7; Heb 1:14; Rev 7:1, 15:1; Mat 24:31, etc.

“And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness” (2Ki 6:18). The “they” looks back to the armed host mentioned in verse 14. Formidable as was the force sent to slay him, or at least take him captive, yet the prophet stood ground and calmly waited their approach. And well he might. Could he say, “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about” (Psa 3:6), and again, “Though an host should encompass about me, my heart shall not fear” (Psa 27:3)! And should not this confidence and courage be the Christian’s? “The clearer sight we have of sovereignty and power of heaven, the less shall we fear the calamities of earth” (M. Henry). Perhaps the reader says, If I were favoured with an accurate view of protecting angels round about me, I would not fear physical danger in human enemies. Ah my friend, is not that tantamount to a confession that you are walking by sight? and may we not apply to you those words, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have *believed*” (Joh 20:29).

Why, think you my reader, has God chronicled here that which assures the heart of His servant of old? Is this nothing more than a registering of a remarkable incident in ancient history? Is *that* how you read and understand the sacred Scriptures? May we not adopt the language used by the apostle in connection with a yet earlier incident and say, “Now it was not written for his sake alone...But for us also” (Rom 4:23, 24)? Most certainly we also, for later on in that very epistle, we are expressly informed, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have *hope*” (Rom 15:4). God recorded that sight of those protecting angels for our faith to lay hold of and remember that if faith is to stand us in good stead in the hour of emergency, it must be regularly nourished by the Word; if it be not, then the terrors of earth will be real to us and the comforts of heaven unreal. Unless faith appropriates that grand truth, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” we shall neither have peace ourselves, nor be qualified to quieten the fears of others.

Second, *its means*. “And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD” (2Ki 6:18). That needs to be pondered and interpreted in the light of the previous verse, or we are likely to miss its beauty and draw a false inference. Very lovely was the prophet’s conduct on this occasion. The presence of those horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha was virtually a sign that God had delivered these Syrians into his hands: he had only to speak the word and the angels had destroyed them. But he bore his enemies no ill will. Had our present verse stood by itself, we might have concluded that the prophet was asking in self-defence, begging the Lord to protect him from his foes, but it opens with the word, “And” and in the light of the one preceding, we are obliged to revise our thought. It is quite clear that Elisha was in no personal danger, so it could not have been out of any concern for his own personal safety that he now sought unto God. Yet, though he calmly awaited their approach, he did not meet his enemies in his own strength, for prayer is an acknowledgement of insufficiency.

“Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness” (2Ki 6:18). At first glance, it seems strange that he is referred to here by his personal name, rather than as “the man of God,” which the Holy Spirit generally uses when he was about to work a miracle; yet the variation in this place is neither fortuitous nor meaningless. It points a blessed lesson for *us*, showing as it does the readiness of the Lord to hearken to the requests of His people. Though we do not possess the extraordinary powers of a prophet, yet it is our privilege to ask God to confuse and confound those of our natural enemies who seek our harm, and to subdue our spiritual ones. This incident has been recorded for our instruction and comfort, and one of the things we are to learn therefrom is that prayer avails to render our enemies impotent. Another lesson we should draw from it will be evident if we link up this verse with the preceding one, wherein we see another of Elisha’s requests granted: success in prayer should encourage and embolden us to ask further favours from God.

Going back again for a moment to Elisha’s situation. This petition of his was neither because he felt he was in any personal danger, nor did it proceed from any spirit of malice which he bore his enemies: then *what* was it that prompted the same? Does not the miraculous healing of Naaman supply the answer to our question! When the king of Israel had rent his clothes in dismay, the man of God assured him that the king of Syria “shall know there is a prophet in Israel” (2Ki 5:7, 8), and when Naaman was recovered of his leprosy, he sought unto the man of God, and before all his own retinue, testified “now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2Ki 5:15). And now this heathen monarch had sent his forces to take the prophet prisoner! Very well, then, if he was not yet convinced that it was the true and living God whom

Elisha served, he should receive further proof. It was *Jehovah's glory* which prompted Elisha's request. Weigh that well my reader, for everything depends upon the motive which inspires our petitions, determining whether or no we shall receive an answer. True and acceptable prayer rises above a sense of personal need, having in view the honour of God's name—keep before you 1 Corinthians 10:31.

“And he smote them with blindness, according to the word of Elisha” (2Ki 6:18). That was an exact reversal of what took place under the foregoing miracle: there the prophet's servant was enabled to see what was invisible to others (2Ki 6:17); but here, the Syrian soldiers were rendered incapable of seeing what was visible to others. But let us behold in this miracle the willingness of our God to respond to the cries of His own, that He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. If we self-distrustfully refuse to encounter foes in our own strength, if we confidently ask God to render their efforts impotent, and if we do so with His glory in view, we may be assured of His gracious intervention. No matter what may be our need, how drastic the situation, how urgent our case, how formidable our adversary, while simple faith is exercised, and the honour of God be our aim, we may count upon His showing Himself strong on our behalf. “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal 3:6): He is the same now as He was in Elisha's day.

Third, *its mercy*. “And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria” (2Ki 6:19). He did not abandon them to their blindness and leave them to themselves: contrast Genesis 19:11, when God was dealing in wrath. Had they not been blinded, probably they would have identified the prophet by his attire; but being strangers to him, they would be unable to recognise him by his voice. Spiritually that illustrates the fundamental difference between the goats and the sheep: the former are incapable of distinguishing between teachers of Truth and of error; not so the latter, for they “know not the voice of strangers” but “will flee from him” (Joh 10:5). But exactly what did Elisha signify by those statements? It is lamentable to find one commentator, in whose notes there is generally that which is sound and good, saying, “The prophet intended to deceive the Syrians, and this might lawfully be done, even if he had meant to treat them as enemies, in order to his own preservation; but he designed them no harm by such deception.”

Apart from such a view giving the worst possible interpretation to the prophet's language, such an observation as the above is most reprehensible. It is never right to do wrong, and no matter what may be our circumstances, for us to deliberately lie is to sin both against God and our fellows. Such an explanation as the above is also absurd on the face of it. Elisha was in no personal danger at all, and now these Syrians were blinded, he could have walked away unmolested by them had he so pleased. “This is not the way”—whitherto. He could not mean to “Dothan,” for they were already there and must have known it. “I will bring you to the man whom ye seek”: and who was that? Why, ultimately and absolutely, the king of Israel, for whom their master has laid an ambush (note verse 11!)—Elisha being merely an obstacle who had hindered him. One who had just obtained from God such an answer to prayer, and who was now showing mercy to his enemies, would scarce lie to them!

Fourth, *its counterpart*. “And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria” (2Ki 6:20). Here was still further proof that Elisha harboured no malice against these Syrians and that he intended them no harm. Though they had hostile designs against him, yet he now uses his interest with the Lord on their behalf. Most gracious was that. What an example for every servant of God: “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2Ti 2:25). Instead of cherishing ill will against those who are unfriendly to us, we should seek their good and pray to the Lord on their behalf. How this incident reminds us of a yet more blessed example: when the Lord of glory in the midst of His sufferings made intercession for His crucifiers (Isa 53:12; Luk 23:34). A further miracle was now wrought in answer to Elisha's intercession, showing us once more the mighty power of God and His willingness to employ the same in answer to the petitions of His people. Note how Elisha made good his promise: he led them to the man they really sought, for the next person mentioned is “the king of Israel”!

Fifth, *its accompaniment*. “And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?” (2Ki 6:21). Very solemn is this and in full accord with his character: the Lord did not open *his* eyes—consequently, he was blind to the working of His goodness and incapable of appreciating the magnanimous spirit, which had been displayed by the prophet. Here we see what man is by nature: fierce, cruel, vindictive. Such are we and all of our fellows as the result of the fall: “Living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Tit 3:3). It is nought, but the restraining hand of God which

prevents our fellows from falling upon us. Were that Hand completely withdrawn, we should be no safer in a 'civilized country' than if we were surrounded by savages or cast into a den of wild beasts. It is not sufficiently realised by us that God's restraining power is upon those who hate us: "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Act 18:10).

"And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master" (2Ki 6:22). Observe how Elisha kept full control of the situation, even though now in the royal quarters—something which every servant of God needs to heed, exercising the authority which Christ has given him. Note too how this verse teaches that mercy is to be shown unto prisoners of war—or taking it in its wider application, how that kindness is to be extended unto our enemies. And this, mark it well, occurred under the O.T. economy! The Divine Law commanded its subjects, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (Pro 25:21 and see also Exo 23:4, 5), much more so under the dispensation of grace are we required to "overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:21).

Sixth, *its sequel*. Elisha had his way and the king, "And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master" (2Ki 6:23a), that he might learn anew that our times, the success or failure of our plans, our health and our lives, are in the hand of the living God, and that He is not only infinite in power, but plenteous in mercy. The sequel was, "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel" (2Ki 6:23b). God honoured the magnanimity of His prophet and rewarded the obedience of his royal master by exempting the land from any further depredations from these savage bands.

Seventh, *its meaning*. May we not see in the above incident another lovely Gospel picture, viewing the graciousness of Elisha unto those who had gone to take him captive as a shadowing forth of God's mercy unto elect sinners? First, we are shown what they are by nature: at enmity with His servant. Second, we behold them as the subjects of His servant's prayers—that they may be granted a sense of their wretched condition. Third, in answer thereto they are duly brought to realise their impotency—who so consciously helpless as the blind! Fourth, they were moved to follow the instructions and guidance of God's servant. Fifth, in due course, their eyes were opened. Sixth, they were feasted with "great provision" at the King's own table. Seventh, the picture is completed by our being given to behold them as *changed* creatures—coming no more on an evil errand into Israel's land.

But is there not also an important spiritual meaning and lesson here for Christians?—one which has been pointed out in the course of our remarks; namely, How we are to deal with those who seek to injure us. Negatively, we are to harbour no malice against such, nor to take vengeance upon them even should Providence deliver them into our hands. Positively, we are to ask the Lord to nullify their efforts and render them powerless to injure us. But more, we are also to pray that God will open their eyes, and treat them kindly and generously: see Matthew 5:44. —A.W.P.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

5b. Its Analogy

Near the close of our last, we stated that increasing *humility* is that in a Christian which corresponds to the downward growth of a tree. As the upward growth of a tree is accompanied by its becoming more deeply rooted in the ground, so the Christian's acquaintance with, love for, and delight in God issues in a deeper self-depreciation and self-detestation. If the knowledge we have acquired of the Truth, or if what we term our "Christian experience" has made us think more highly of ourselves and better pleased with our attainment and performances, then that is a sure proof we are completely deceived, imagining we have made any real growth upward. The grand design of the Scriptures is to exalt God and humble man, and the more we experimentally or spiritually know God, the less we shall think of ourselves and the lower place shall we take before Him. The knowledge which "puffeth up" is merely an intellectual or speculative one, but that which the Spirit imparts causes its recipient to feelingly own that I "knoweth nothing yet" as I "ought to know" (1Co 8:2).

The more the soul converses with God and the more it perceives His Sovereignty and majesty, the more will he exclaim with Abraham, "which am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). The more the believer is granted a spiritual view of the Divine perfections, the more will he acknowledge with Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). The more the saint apprehends the ineffable holiness of the Lord, the more will he declare with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). The more he is occupied with the perfections of Christ, the more will he find with Daniel, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (Dan 10:8). The more he discerns that exalted spirituality of God's Law and how little his inner man is conformed thereto, the more will he groan in concert with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24). In God's light, we see ourselves, discover the horrible corruptions of our very nature, mourn over the plague of our own heart (1Ki 8:38), and marvel at the continued long sufferance of God unto us.

The truly humble person is not the one who *talks most* of his own unworthiness, and is frequently telling of how such and such an experience abased him into the dust. "There are many that are full of expressions of their own *vileness*, who yet expect to be looked upon as eminent saints by others as their duty, and it is dangerous for any so much as to hint the contrary or to carry it toward them any otherwise than as if we looked upon them as some of the chief of Christians. There are many that are much in crying out their wicked hearts and their great shortcomings and unprofitableness, and speaking of themselves as though they looked on themselves as the meanest of the saints; who yet, if a minister should seriously tell them the same things in private, and should signify that he feared they were very low and weak Christians and that they had reason solemnly to consider of their great barrenness and unprofitableness and falling so much short of many others, it would be more than they could digest. They would think themselves highly injured and there would be danger of a rooted prejudice in them against such a minister" (J. Edwards).

The same writer defined evangelical humility as the "sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart." That answerable frame of heart consists of being "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3), a sense of deep need, a realisation of sinfulness and helplessness. The natural man compares himself with his fellows and prides himself that he is at least as good as his neighbours. But the regenerate person measures himself by the exalted standard which *God* has set before him and which is perfectly exemplified in the example Christ has left him that he should "follow his steps" (1Pe 2:21), and as he discovers how lamentably he falls short of that standard and how "far off" he follows Christ, he is filled with shame and contrition. This empties him of self-righteousness and causes him to depend wholly on the finished work of Christ. It makes him conscious of his weakness and fearful that he will suffer a sad fall, and therefore, he looks above for help and cries, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Psa 119:117). Thus, the truly humble person is the one who lives most outside of himself on Christ.

This brings us to those oft-quoted, but we fear, little-understood words: "Grow in grace" (2Pe 3:18). Growth in grace is only too frequently confused with the development of the Christian's *graces*. That is why we selected a different title for these articles than the one commonly accorded the subject. Growth in

grace is but one aspect or part of spiritual growth and Christian progress. When a minister asked a simple countryside woman what was her concept of "growing in grace," she replied, "A Christian's growth in grace is like the growth of a cow's tail." Puzzled at her reply, he asked for an explanation. Whereupon she said, "The more a cow's tail grows, the nearer it comes to the ground; and the more a Christian grows in grace, the more does he take his place in the dust before God." Ah, she had been taught from above what many an eminent theologian and commentator is unacquainted with. Growth in grace is a growth *downward*: it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves, it is a deepening realisation of our nothingness, it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies.

What is it to enter into a personal experience of saving grace? Is it not a feeling my deep *need* of Christ and the consequent perception of His perfect suitability to my desperate case?—to be acutely conscious that I am "sick" in soul and the betaking of myself to the great "Physician." If so, then must not any advancement in grace consist of an intensification of the same experience, a clearer and fuller realisation of my need of Christ? And such growth in grace results from a closer acquaintance and fellowship with Him: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (2Pe 1:2)—that is, a vital, practical, effectual knowledge of Him. In His light we see light: we become better acquainted with ourselves, more aware of our total depravity, more conscious of the workings of our corruptions. Grace is favour shown unto the undeserving, and the more we grow in grace, the more we perceive our undeservingness, the more we feel our need of grace, the more sensible we are of our indebtedness to the God of all grace. Thereby are we taught to walk with God and to make more and more use of Christ.

Every Christian reader will agree that if ever there was one child of God who more than others "grew in grace," it was the apostle Paul, and yet observe how he said, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to *think any thing* as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2Co 3:5); and again, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1Co 15:10). What breathings of humility were those! But we can appeal to an infinitely higher and more perfect example. Of the Lord Jesus, it is said that He was "*full of grace and truth*" (Joh 1:14), and yet He declared, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat 11:29). Does the reader detect a slip of the pen in the last sentence? Since Christ was "*full of grace and truth*," we should have said, "*therefore* (and not 'yet'). He declared, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart'"—the latter was the evidence of the former! Yes, so "meek and lowly in heart" was He that, though the Lord of glory, He declined not to perform the menial task of washing the feet of His disciples! And in proportion, as we learn of Him, shall *we* become meek and lowly in heart. Hence, "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" is explanatory of "grow in grace" in 2 Peter 3:18.

True humility dwells only in a heart which has been supernaturally enlightened of God and which has experimentally learned of Christ, and the more the soul learns of Christ, the more lowly will it become. Even in natural things, it is the novice, and not the servant, who is the most conceited. A smattering of the arts and sciences fills its youthful possessor with an exalted estimate of his wisdom, but the further he prosecutes his studies, the more conscious will he become of his ignorance. Much more so is this the case with spiritual things. An unregenerate person who becomes familiar with the letter of the Truth imagines he has made great progress in religion; but a regenerate person—even after fifty years in the school of Christ—deems himself a very babe in spirituality. The more a soul grows in grace, the more does he grow out love with himself. In one of his early epistles, Paul said, "I am the least of the apostles" (1Co 15:9); in a later, "who am less than the least of all saints (Eph 3:8); in one of his last, "sinners, of whom I am chief" (1Ti 1:15)!

Third, trees grow *inwardly*, which brings us to what is admittedly the hardest part of our subject. We have never made a study of botany, and even though we had, it is doubtful if it would stand us in much stead on this point. That there must be an inward growth of the tree is obvious, though, exactly what it consists of is another matter. Yet that need not surprise us, for the analogy holds good here, too, is not this uncertainty just what we should expect? Is not the inward growth of a Christian that aspect of his progress which is the most difficult to define, describe, and still more so, to put into practice? Unless the tree grows inwardly, it would not grow in any other direction, for its outward growth is but the development and manifestation of its vital or seminal principle. We must fall back then on general principle and exercise a little common sense, and say: the inward growth of a tree consists of an increase of its sap, a resisting of that which would injure, and the toughening of its tissues.

The sap is the vital juice of all plants, and its free circulation, the determined of its health and growth. The analogy of this in the Christian is the grace of God communicated to his soul, and his spiritual progress is fundamentally determined by his receiving fresh supplies of grace. At regeneration, God does not impart to us a supply of grace sufficient for the remainder of our lives: instead, He has made Christ to be the grand Fountain of all grace, and we are required to continue betaking ourselves to Him for fresh supplies. The Lord Jesus has issued a free invitation: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Joh 7:37), which must not be restricted to our first approach. As long as the Christian remains on earth, he is as needy as when he drew his first spiritual breath, and his need is supplied in no other way than by his coming to Christ daily for fresh supplies of His grace. Christ is "full of grace" and that fulness is *available* for His people to draw from (Heb 4:16). "He giveth more grace...unto the humble" (Jam 4:6)—that is, to those who "thirst," who are conscious of their need and who present themselves as empty vessels to be replenished.

But there is another principle which operates and regulates our obtaining further supplies of grace: "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Mat 25:29, compare Luk 8:18). The context shows that the one who "hath" is he who has traded with what had been bestowed upon him—in other words, the way to obtain more grace, is to make a right and good *use* of what we *already* have—why should Christ give more if we have not improved what He previously communicated? Faith becomes stronger by exercising it. And *how* does the Christian make a good use of grace? By heeding that all-important injunction, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Pro 4:23). *This* is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. The "heart" signifies the whole inner man—the "hidden man of the heart" (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we become and do. The man is what his heart is, for "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pro 23:7). To guard and garrison the heart is the grand work God has appointed us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours.

Negatively, the keeping of the heart with all diligence signifies, excluding from it all that is opposed to God. It means the keeping of the imagination free from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear from all guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the inner man from being dominated by sin and Satan. In a word, it means, to *mortify* the "flesh" within us, with all its affections and lusts: to resist evil imaginations, nipping them in the bud, to strive against the swellings of pride, the workings of unbelief, to swim against the tide of the world, to reject the solicitations of the Devil. This is to be our constant concern and ceaseless endeavour. It means to keep the conscience tender unto sin in its first approach. It means looking diligently after its cleansing when it has been defiled. For all of this, much prayer is required, earnest seeking of God's assistance. His supernatural aid, and if it be sought trustfully, it will not be sought in vain, for it is the grace of God which teaches us *to deny* "ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Tit 2:11, 12).

Positively, the keeping of our hearts with all diligence signifies the cultivation of our spiritual graces—called "the fruit of the spirit" (Gal 5:22, 23). For the health, vigour, exercise, and manifestation of those graces, we are accountable. They are like so many tender plants which will not thrive, unless they are given much attention. They are like so many tendrils on a vine which must be lifted from trailing on the ground, pruned and sprayed, if they are to be fruitful. They are like so many saplings in the nursery which need rich soil, regular watering, and the warmth of the sun, if they are to thrive. Go carefully over the nine-fold list given in Galatians 5:22, 23, and then honestly ask the question, What sincere effort am I really making to cultivate, to foster, to develop those graces? Compare, too, the sevenfold list of 2 Peter 1:5-7 and put to yourself a similar inquiry. When your graces are lively and flourishing and Christ draws near, you will be able to say, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies" (Son 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear—compare 1 Peter 3:4 and 1 Timothy 1:5.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1Sa 16:7). Is that sufficiently realised by us? If it is, then we are making it our chief concern to keep our hearts with all diligence. "My son, give me thine *heart*" (Pro 23:26): until *that* be done, God will accept nothing from you. The prayers and praises of our lips, the offerings and labours of our hands, yea, a correct outward walk, are things of no value in His sight—unless the heart beats true to Him. Nor will He accept a divided heart. And if I *have* really given Him my heart, then it is to be *kept* for Him, it must be devoted to Him, it must be suited to Him. Ah, my reader, there is much head religion, much hand religion—busily engaged in what is termed, "Christian service," and much feet religion—rushing around from one meeting, "Bible Confer-

ence,” “Communion,” to another, but where are those who make conscience of keeping their *hearts!* The heart of the empty professor is like “the vineyard of the man void of [spiritual] understanding,” namely, “all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof” (Pro 24:30, 31).

A very few words must suffice upon the third aspect of inward growth. In the case of a tree, this consists in the toughening of its tissues or strengthening of its fibres—apparent from the harder wood obtained from an older one than from a sapling. The spiritual counterpart of that is found in the Christian attaining unto more firmness and fixedness of character, so that he is no longer swayed by the opinions of others. He becomes more stable, so that he is less emotional and more rational, acting not from sudden impulse, but from settled principle. He becomes wiser in spiritual things, because his mind is increasingly engaged with the Word of God and his eternal concerns; and therefore, more serious and sober in his demeanour. He becomes confirmed in doctrine; and therefore, more discerning and discriminating in whom he hears and what he reads. Nothing can move him from allegiance to Christ, and having bought the Truth, he refuses to sell it (Pro 23:23). He is not afraid of being called a bigot, for he has discovered that “liberality” is emblazoned prominently as the Devil’s banner.

Fourth, the growth of a tree is *outward*, seen in the spreading of its bough, and the multiplication of its branches. We have purposely devoted a great space unto those aspects of our subject, on which we felt the reader most needs help. This one almost explains itself: it is the *daily walk* of the believer, his external conduct, which is in view. If the Christian has grown upward—that is, if he has obtained an increased vital and practical knowledge of God in Christ; if he has grown downward—that is, if he has become thoroughly aware of his total depravity by nature and learned to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3) to effect any improvement in himself; if he has grown inwardly, obtained fresh supplies of grace from Christ and has diligently used the same striving against indwelling sin, and by resolutely resisting his carnal and worldly lusts, and if he has improved that grace by diligently cultivating his spiritual graces in the garden of his heart; then that upward, downward and inward growth will be (not simply “ought to be”), *must be*, clearly and unmistakably shown in his outward life.

And how will that upward, downward and inward growth be manifested by the Christian outwardly? Why, by a life of *obedience* to his Lord and Saviour. Out of love and gratitude unto the One who suffered and did so much for him, he will sincerely endeavour to please Him in all his ways. Realising that he is not his own, but bought with a price, he will make it his highest aim and earnest endeavour to glorify God in his body and in his spirit (1Co 6:19, 20). The genuineness of his desire to please God, and the intensity of his purpose to glorify Him, will be evidenced by the diligence and constancy with which he reads, meditates upon, and studies His Word. In searching the Scriptures, his main quest will not be to occupy his mind with its mysteries, but rather, to obtain a fuller knowledge of God’s *will for him*; and instead of hankering after an insight into its typology or its prophecies, he will be far more concerned in how to become *more proficient* in performing God’s will. It is in the light of His Word he longs to walk; and therefore, it is His precepts and promises, His warnings and admonitions, His exhortations and aids, he will most lay to heart.

One of the N.T. exhortations is, “We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would *abound more and more*” (1Th 4:1). One of its prayers is, “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:9, 10). One of its promises is, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, *may abound* to every good work” (2Co 9:8). And one of its examples is, “And they [the parents of John the Baptist] were both righteous before God, walking in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*” (Luk 1:6). In the light of those verses—each of which treats with outward growth—our duty and privilege is clear: what God requires from us and the sufficiency of His enablement for the same. —A. W. P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5b. Its Arrangement

A solemn covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son before ever the world was. A compact was made wherein the Father assigned the Son to be the Head and Saviour of His elect, and wherein the Son consented to act as the Surety and Sponsor of His people. There was a mutual agreement between them, of which the Holy Spirit was both the Witness and Recorder. It was therein that the Son was appointed unto the Mediatorial office, when He was "set up" (or "anointed" as the Hebrew signifies), when He was "brought forth" from the eternal decree (Pro 8:23, 24) and given a covenant subsistence as the God-man. It was then that Christ as a lamb, without blemish and without spot, "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1Pe 1:18-20). It was then that every thing was arranged between the Father and the Son, concerning the redemption of the Church. It is this which throws such a flood of light upon many passages in the N.T.—which otherwise are shrouded in mystery.

As the One more especially offended (1Jo 2:1), the Father is represented as taking the initiative in this matter: "I have made a covenant with my chosen" (Psa 89:3), yet the very fact that it was a "covenant" necessarily implied the willing concurrence of the Son therein. Before the covenant was settled, there was a conference between them. As there was a conferring together of the Divine Persons concerning our creation (Gen 1:26), so there was a consultation together over our reconciliation, as to how peace could be righteously made between God and His enemies, and as to how their enmity against Him might be slain; and thus, we are told, "and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zec 6:13). The terms which the Father proposed unto the Son may be gathered from the office He assumed and the work He performed—for the relation into which He entered and the task He discharged were but the actual fulfilling of the conditions of the covenant. The Son's acceptance of those terms, His willingness in entering its office and discharging its duties, is clearly revealed in both Testaments.

This covenant was made by the Father with Christ on behalf of His people. "Thy seed will I establish for ever" follows immediately after Psalm 89:3. So again, "My covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever" (Psa 89:28, 29). In the next verses, His seed are termed, "his children;" and should they be unruly, God says, "Then will I visit *their* transgression with the rod. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from *him*" (Psa 89:32, 33)—showing their covenant oneness with Him. The elect were committed to Christ as a charge or trust, so that He is held accountable for their eternal felicity. "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none." (Joh 18:9)! Since the covenant was made with Christ as the Head of the elect, it was virtually made with them in Him, they having a representative concurrence therein.

The terms of the covenant may be summed up thus. First, it was required that Christ should take upon Him the form of a Servant, be made in the likeness of men, and act as the Surety of His people. Second, it was required of Him that He should render a full and perfect obedience to the Law; and thereby, provide the meritorious means of their justification. Third, it was required of Him that He should make full satisfaction for their sins, by serving as their Substitute and having visited upon Him the entire curse of the Law. In consideration of His acceptance of those terms, the Father promised Him adequate supports; and on fulfillment of the task prescribed, specified reward were promised Him. Let us briefly amplify these points. Little needs to be said on the first—for it should be clear to the reader that in order for the Son to render obedience to the Law, He must become a subject of it and be under its authority. Equally evident is it that to be the Substitute of His people and suffer the penalty of their sins, He must become partaker of their nature—yet without sharing its defilement.

It was required from our Surety that He should comply in every respect with the precepts of the Divine Law. Such obedience was required of man originally under the Adamic covenant, and since the nature of God and His relation to the creature changes not, that requirement holds good for ever. If then a Surety engages to discharge all the obligations of God's elect, then He must necessarily meet that requirement on their behalf—which is only another way of saying that He would thereby provide or bring in an everlasting righteousness for them. "There was no possibility that man could obtain happiness, unless this obedience was performed by him, or by another whom the Law should admit to act in his name. 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments' (Mat 19:17) is the answer which the Law returns to the sinner who asks

what he shall do to inherit eternal life. It is evident the same obedience was required from our Saviour when acting as our federal Head" (J. Dick).

The Father required from our Surety full satisfaction for the sins of His people. Since they had broken the Divine Law, its penalty must be inflicted—either on them or on One who was prepared to suffer in their room. But before the penalty could be inflicted, the guilt of the transgressors must be transferred to Him: that is to say, their sins must be judicially imputed to Him. To that arrangement, the Holy One willingly consented, so that He who "knew no sin" was legally "made sin" for His people. God laid on Him the iniquities of them all; and therefore, the sword of Divine justice smote Him and exacted satisfaction. Without the shedding of blood, there was no remission of sins: the blotting out of transgression, procuring for us the favour of God, and the purchase of the heavenly inheritance, required the death of Christ.

The Son's free acceptance of those terms is revealed in Psalm 40. All the best of the commentators from Calvin to Spurgeon have expounded this Psalm throughout of Christ as the Head of His Church. Its opening verses contain His personal thanksgiving for deliverance from death and the grave, but in His new song, He makes mention of "*our* God" (Psa 40:3)—His people sharing His glorious triumph. In Psalm 40:5, Christ owns Jehovah as "my God" and speaks of His thoughts to "*us-ward*"—that is, to the elect as one with Himself. But it is in Psalm 40:6-10 we have that which is most germane to our present subject—a passage quoted in Hebrews 10, and which looks back to the far distant past. The force of "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire" (Psa 40:6) is given us in, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). "Mine ears hast thou opened" (Psa 40:6) speaks in the type of Exodus 21:5, 6 and tells of our Lord's readiness to serve and His love to His Father and His children. "A body hast thou prepared me" (Heb 10:5) announces the Son's coming into this world, equipped for His arduous undertaking.

"Then said I": when alternatives had been discussed and it was agreed that animal sacrifices were altogether inadequate for satisfying Divine justice, "Lo, I come": willingly of Mine own volition—from the ivory palaces to the abodes of misery. Those words signified His cheerful acceptance of the terms of the covenant. "In the volume [or 'head'] of the book, it is written of me" (Psa 40:7; Heb 10:7): thus, it was recorded at the very beginning of the Divine decrees—of which the Scriptures are a faithful transcript—that I should make My advent to earth. Thus, it was registered by the Holy Spirit who witnessed My solemn engagement with the Father so to do. Thus, it was formally and officially inscribed that in the fulness of time, I should become incarnate and accomplish a purpose which lay beyond the capacity of all the holy angels. "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa 40:8) tells us first of the object for which He came—to make good the Father's counsels; second, His freeness and joy therein; third, the character in which He acted—as covenant Head: "My God."

"I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa 40:8). Herein consists the very essence of obedience: the soul's cheerful and loving devotion to God. Christ's obedience, which is the righteousness of His people, was pre-eminent in this quality. Notwithstanding unparalleled sorrows and measureless griefs, our Lord found delight in His work: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2). "Yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psa 40:8), He declared. No mere outward and formal subjection to the Divine will was His. That Law which is "holy, and just, and *good*" (Rom 7:12) was enshrined in His affections. "O how love I thy law!" (Psa 119:97), He averred. The Law did not have to be "written" on *His* heart, as it has on ours (Heb 8:10), for it was one with the holiness of His nature. Then what a horrible crime for any to speak disparagingly of or want to be delivered from that Law which Christ loved!

The two things—the Father's proposing the terms of the covenant and the Son's free acceptance of them—are brought together in a striking, yet rarely considered passage: "And their nobles [the Hebrew is in the singular number] shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD" (Jer 30:21). That is one of the great Messianic prophecies, and it is closely parallel with Psalm 89:19, 20, 27. In it, we see the Father taking the initiative, and equally so the Son's cheerful compliance. The Son is to become incarnate, for He was to "proceed from the midst of" the people of Israel. He was to be the "Governor," and in order thereto is seen "approaching" the Father, or voluntarily presenting Himself to serve in that capacity. His free consent and heartiness so to act appears in His, "that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD" (Jer 30:21).

We cannot now enter into the connections of the above verse, but if the reader compares verse 9 of the same chapter and ponders what follows, he will find confirmation of our interpretation. There, the Father announced, "But they shall *serve* the LORD their God, *and* David their king, whom I will raise up [not from the grave, but exalt to office, as in Deu 18:15, Luk 1:69, etc.] unto them." That can be meant of none other than Christ, the antitypical David, for "serve" includes rendering Divine homage (Mat 4:10), and worship will never be performed to the resurrected son of Jesse. Now it is the antitypical David—the Father's "Beloved"—who is the King and Governor of the spiritual Israel and to whom Divine honours are paid. And He is the One who before earth's foundation was laid, "engaged his heart" (Jer 30:21)—or as the Hebrew signifies, "became a *surety* in his heart" (for so the word is rendered in Gen 44:32, Pro 6:1, etc.), and *that* is the ground of the covenant which follows: "And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer 30:22).

Before looking at some of the assurances made by the Father of adequate assistance to His incarnate Son in the discharge of His covenant engagement, we must consider more closely *the office* in which He served. In previous articles, we pointed out the needs for a Mediator—if God and His people were to be reconciled in a way that honoured His Law—as we also intimated His consummate wisdom in such an arrangement, and showed the perfect fitness of Christ for such an office. As the Mediator, He was to serve as our Surety and also fulfill the functions of Prophet, Priest, and King. As the Mediator, He was "set up" or "anointed" from the beginning (Pro 8:23)—that is, when given a covenant subsistence as such before God, in which He acted all through the O.T. era. The prophets (equally with the apostles) were *His* ministers; and therefore, the Spirit who spoke in them is termed, "the Spirit of Christ" (1Pe 1:11). In Zechariah 1:11, 12 and 3:2, we find Him interceding; and in anticipation of the incarnation, He appeared as "man" (Jos 5:13, 14; Dan 12:6, 7).

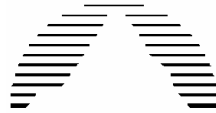
Christ is Mediator in respect of His person, as well as office. Only then could He be the Representative of God unto us, the Image of the invisible God, the One in whom He is seen (Joh 14:9), the light of whose glory shines in His face (2Co 4:6). It must ever be remembered that it was a Divine person who became flesh, and it is equally necessary to insist that the whole of His mediatory work is inseparably founded on the exercise of *both* of His natures. It is quite unwarrantable to predicate certain things of His Divine nature, and others of His human—for though not confounded, there is perfect oneness between them. It was the God-man who was tempted, suffered and died—"the *Lord's* death" (1Co 11:26). This is indeed a subject beyond human comprehension; nevertheless, though "great is the mystery of godliness," yet it is "without controversy" (1Ti 3:16) unto all those who bow to the all-sufficient authority of Divine revelation and receive the same as "little children" (Mat 18:3).

As the Mediator Christ became the Father's "servant" (Isa 42:1; Phi 2:7). Yet in so doing, He ceased not to be a Divine person, but rather the God-man in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Co1 2:9). As our Surety, Christ became subordinate to the Father's will; nevertheless, He still retained all His Divine perfections and prerogatives. When the Holy Spirit announced that unto us a Child should be born and a Son given, He was careful to declare that such an One was none other than "The mighty God" (Isa 9:6). When the Father brought His First begotten into the world, He gave orders, "Let all the angels of God *worship* him." (Heb 1:6). Yet as our Surety and the Father's Servant, He was "sent" into the world, received "commandment" from His Father and became "obedient" unto death. Retaining as He did His Divine perfections, He could rightly say, "I and my Father are one" (Joh 10:30), co-equal and co-glorious—yet, as the Servant, "My Father is greater than I" (Joh 14:28)—not essentially so, but officially; not by nature, but by virtue of the place which He had taken. This distinction throws a flood of light upon many passages.

To be Himself "the true God" (1Jo 5:20) and yet subject to God—owning Him as "My God;" to be the Law-Giver, and yet "under the law" (Gal 4:4), to be One with the Father and yet inferior to Him, to be "The Lord of glory" (1Co 2:8) and yet "*made...both* Lord and Christ" (Act 2:36) are—according to all human reason and logic—inconsistent properties; nevertheless, Scripture itself expressly predicates these very things of one and the same Person—yet looked at in *different relationships!* In the days of His flesh, Christ was "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom 9:5), yet as our Surety, "the head of Christ is God" (1Co 11:3). While walking this earth as the Man of sorrows, the disciples beheld His glory "as of the only begotten of the Father" (Joh 1:14)—yet as our Substitute, He was "crucified through weakness" (2Co 13:4). As God manifest in flesh, He both laid down His life and took it again (John 10:18); but as our Shepherd, God

“brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus” (Heb 13:20). There is perfect harmony amid wondrous variety.

Christ’s entrance into covenant engagement was entirely voluntary on His part: there existed no prior obligation, nor was there any authority by which He could be compelled to it. As the Father’s “Fellow,” He was subject to no law and acknowledged no superior, supreme dominion was His, and He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6). But having freely entered into the covenant and agreed to fulfill its terms, the Son became officially subordinate to the Father, and as our Surety, He sent Him “into the world” (Joh 3:17), and as our Surety, He was “anointed...with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Act 10:38), was “delivered...up for us all” (Rom 8:32), was raised from the dead (Act 2:24), was given “all power...in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18), was elevated to the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3), was exalted “to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31), and was “ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Act 10:42). Thus, the very passages over which “Unitarians” have stumbled and broken their necks, speak of Christ not in His essential Person, but in His mediatorial office: the former giving value to the latter—the latter endearing the former to our hearts. —A.W.P.



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