

THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Our desire is to contemplate here, by the help of the Holy Spirit, that lovely perfection of the Lord Jesus which was the very life and beauty of His mediatorial holiness. His obedience was the absolute conformity of His entire spirit and soul to the will and mind of His Father; His ready and cheerful performance of every duty and everything which God commanded Him. This obedience He performed perfectly, amid the greatest and sorrest trials, with infinite respect unto Him whose "Servant" (Isa. 42:1) He had become. The laws which He obeyed were, first, those to which He was subject considered simply as man (Gal. 4:4), namely, the Ten Commandments or moral law. Second, those to which He was subject considered as Son of David (Matt. 1:1), namely, the ceremonial law of Israel. Third, those to which He was subject as Mediator, namely, fulfilling the commandments which He had received from the Father to preach the Gospel, perform miracles, call disciples, and die upon the Cross.

The closer the four Gospels be read in the light of our present subject, the more will it be seen that obedience to the Father was Christ's supreme mission on earth. As He Himself declared, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John 4:34); and again, "For I came down from Heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38). Familiar as are these verses to many Christians, few have seen the *fullness* of His obedience, or perceived that *every act* of Christ during the thirty-three years He tabernacled among men was distinctly and designedly an act of submission unto God. Limited space will not allow us to attempt much more than an outline of this blessed fact and truth as it was realized in the life of Him who always did those things which pleased the Father (John 8:29).

Christ's birth was an act of obedience. This will be the more evident if we recognize that every prophecy of God concerning His Son was for Christ a command and the fulfillment of each prophecy was a designed act of obedience on His part. Hence, in Matthew 1:20-23 we find an angel announcing to Joseph, "Thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was done, *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son." Thus, in subjection to His Father's decree the Lord of glory condescended to be made of a woman. Compare Hebrews 10:5-9.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to *fulfill all righteousness*" (Matt. 3:13-15). Here it is distinctly said that Christ's baptism had to do with the fulfilling of "righteousness" or right doing, measuring up to the required standard. His words to John signified, "Neither you or I can do the will of the Father except I submit to baptism, and you baptize Me."

The perfect obedience of Christ appears next in His resistance to Satan's temptations. There we see the great Enemy seeking to turn aside the Saviour from the path of com-

plete surrender to God's will; but in vain. Christ unhesitatingly refused to perform the Devil's bidding, meeting each assault with an "It is written," which was the same as though He had said, "I decline to go contrary to the Divine precepts, I refuse to disobey My Father." Possibly Matthew 4:1-10 will appear in a newer or clearer light if the reader turns to and sees in its contents a studied effort on the part of the Serpent to induce the last Adam unto an act of disobedience, and His steadfast refusal to take one step contrary to the revealed will of God.

The perfect servant of God chose His place of labour in obedience to God's revealed will. "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast in the borders of Zabulon and Naphtali: *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet" (Matt. 4:12-14). It was not the force of circumstances which drove the Lord Jesus to select Capernaum as His ministerial headquarters, nor was it of personal inclination; that town had been singled out by God long before His Son came to earth, and it was in subordination to the Divine will that He went there. How this shows us that Christ made obedience unto God the one great business of His life!

His miracles of mercy were wrought in obedience to the Father's revealed will. "When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with demons; and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick; *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:16, 17). How striking is the particular aspect of truth here made known to us! Christ was tender, sympathetic, and full of compassion, yet the first and deepest motive which moved Him to heal the sick was that the will of God might be done. Beautifully does this come out in John 11. Though Martha and Mary had sent a message unto Christ that their brother was sick, He responded not to their appeal till the Father's hour arrived: see verses 4-6.

His saving of sinners was in order to render obedience unto God. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out; *for* I came down from Heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." What a view does this present to us of the redemptive work of Christ! How it magnifies His blessed submission unto the One who had sent Him into this world!

The Redeemer's preservation of His people is in obedience to the Father. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). Thus, the security of the saint depends not only upon the Saviour's love unto His own, or His all-mighty power, but is as well His act of subjection to God.

His very death was itself an act of submission to the Father, for He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross" (Phil. 2:8). As He Himself declared concerning His life, I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This *commandment* have I received of My Father" (John 10:18). Thus, there were no limits to His obedience, no reserve in His subjection to the Father's will, but complete and perfect compliance with the same throughout the whole of His earthly life. How blessed it is to perceive that through and by His Son's obedience God has been more honoured upon earth than He has been dishonoured by all the disobedience of all the sons of Adam!

In seeking to make an application of that which has been before us, let us point out, first, that this perfect obedience of Christ is reckoned to the account of all and each of His

people, being that “righteousness” which is imputed by God to them; as it is written, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made (legally constituted) righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Second, Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps: “he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Third, obedience is to be the one aim and mission of the Christian. To us Christ says, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15); and again, “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10). A.W.P.

N.B. For much of the above we are indebted to an article by J.W. Gillon, which appeared in the “Western Recorder” of November 15, 1917.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

59. *The Faith of Noah: Hebrews 11:6, 7.*

The verses which are now to engage our attention are by no means free of difficulty, especially unto those who have sat under a ministry which has failed to preserve the balance between Divine grace and Divine righteousness. Where the free favour of God has been strongly emphasized and His *claims* largely ignored, where privileges have been stressed and duties almost neglected, it is far from easy to view many Scriptures in their true perspective. When those who have heard little more than the decrying of creature-abilities and the denunciation of creature-merits are asked to honestly and seriously face the terms of Hebrews 11:6, 7, they are quite unable to fit them into their system of theology. Where such be the case, it is proof positive that something is wrong with our theology. Often those who are least cramped by sectarian bias find that the truth of God is too large, too many-sided, to be squeezed into human definitions and creeds.

Others of our readers are probably wondering what it is we have reference to above when we say that our present portion of Hebrews 11 is by no means free of difficulty. Then let us raise a few questions upon these verses. If the exercise of faith be pleasing to God, does this signify that it is a thing meritorious? How is this concept to be avoided in the light of the statement that God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? How does a “reward” consist with pure grace? And what is the doctrinal force of the next verse? Does the case of Noah teach salvation by works? If he had not gone to so much expense and labour in building the ark, would he and his house have escaped the flood? Was his becoming “heir of righteousness” something that he earned by his obedient toil? How can this conclusion be fairly avoided? We shall endeavour to keep these questions before us in the course of our exposition.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (v. 6). There is a threefold “coming to God”: an initial, a continuous, and a final. The first takes place at conversion, the second is repeated throughout the Christian’s life, the third occurs at death or the second coming of Christ. To come to God signifies to seek and have fellowship with Him. It denotes a desire to enter into His favour and become a partaker of His blessings in this life and of His salvation in the life to come. It is the heart’s approach unto Him in and through Christ: John 14:6, Hebrews 7:25. But before there is a conscious access to Him, God has to be diligently sought.

None come to God, none truly seek Him, until they are made conscious of their lost condition. The Spirit must first work in the soul a realization that sin has alienated us “from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). We have to be made to feel that we are *away from* God, out of His favour, under His righteous condemnation, before we shall really do as the prodigal did, and say “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee” (Luke 15:18). The same principle holds good in connection with the repeated “coming” of the Christian (1 Peter 2:4); it is a sense of need which causes us to seek Him who is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. There is also a maintained communion with God in the performance of holy duties: in all the exercises of godliness we renew our access to God in Christ: in reading of or hearing His Word, we come to Him as Teacher, in prayer we come to Him as Benefactor. But to seek God aright, He has to be sought in faith, for “without faith it is impossible to

please Him,” therefore, “he that cometh to God *must* believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” There has to be first a firm persuasion of His being, and second of His bounty. To believe that “He is” means much more than assenting to the fact of a “First Cause” or to allow that there is a “Supreme Being”; it means to believe in the character of God *as* He has revealed Himself in His works, in His Word, and in Christ. He must be conceived of aright, or otherwise we are only pursuing a phantom of our own imagination. Thus to believe that “God is” is to exercise faith upon Him as *such* a Being as His Word declares Him to be: supreme sovereign, ineffably holy, all-mighty, inflexibly just, yet abounding in mercy and grace toward poor sinners through Christ.

Not only is the heart to go out unto God as His being and character is revealed in Scripture, but particularly, faith is to lay hold of His graciousness: that He is “a *Rewarder*” etc. The acting of faith toward God as a “Rewarder” is the heart’s apprehension and anticipation of the fact that He is ready and willing to conduct Himself to needy sinners in a way of bounty, that He will act in all things toward them in a manner suitable unto the proposal of which He makes of Himself through the Gospel. It was the realization of this (in addition to his felt need) which stirred the prodigal to act. Just as it would be useless to pray unless there were an hope that God hears and that He will answer prayer, so no sinner will really seek unto God until there is born in his heart an expectation of mercy from Him, that He will receive him graciously. This is a laying hold of His promise.

In Scripture, privileges are propounded with their necessary limitations, and we disjoint the whole system of Truth if we separate the recompense from the duty. There is something to be done on our part: God is a “Rewarder,” but *of whom*? Of those who “diligently seek Him.” “The wicked shall be turned into Hell, all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17): not only “deny,” but “forget” Him; as they cast God out of their thoughts and affections, so He will cast them out of His presence. What is meant by “diligently seek Him”? To “seek” God is to forsake, deny, go out of self, and take Him alone for our Ruler and satisfying Portion. To seek Him “diligently” is to seek Him early (Prov. 8:17), wholeheartedly (Psa. 119:10), earnestly (Psa. 27:4), unweariedly (Luke 11:8). How does a thirsty man seek water? The promise is, “And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13 and cf. 2 Chron. 15:15).

And *how* does God “reward” the diligent seeker? By offering Himself graciously to be found of them who penitently, earnestly, trustfully approach Him through the appointed Mediator. By granting them access into His favour: this He did not unto Cain, who sought Him in a wrong manner. By actually bestowing His favour upon them, as He did upon the prodigal. By forgiving their sins and blotting out their iniquities (Isa. 55:7). By writing His laws in their hearts, so that they now desire and determine to forsake all idols and serve Him only. By giving them assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, and granting them sweet foretastes of the rest and bliss which awaits them on High. By ministering to their every need, both spiritual and temporal. Finally, by taking them to Heaven, where they shall spend eternity in the unclouded enjoyment of the wondrous riches of His grace.

But does this word “Rewarder” have a legalistic ring to it? Not if it be understood rightly. Does it signify that our “diligent seeking” is a meritorious performance which is

entitled to recognition? Of course it does not. What, then, is meant? First, let us quote from the helpful comments of John Owen: “That which these words of the apostle hath respect to, and which is the ground of the faith here required, is contained in the revelation that God made of Himself unto Abraham, ‘Fear not: Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward’ (Gen. 15:1). God is so a rewarder unto them that seek Him, as that He is Himself their reward, which eternally excludes all thoughts of merit in them that are so rewarded. Who can merit God to be his reward? Rewarding in God, especially where He Himself is the reward, is an act of infinite grace and bounty. And this gives us full direction unto the object of faith here intended, namely, God in Christ, as revealed in the promise of Him, giving Himself unto believers as a reward, (to be their God) in a way of infinite goodness and bounty. The proposal hereof, is that alone which gives encouragement to come unto Him, which the apostle designs to declare.”

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom. 4:4): is not the implication clear that *grace* itself also “rewards”? Grace and reward are no more inconsistent than the high sovereignty of God and the real responsibility of man, or between the fact that Christ is and was both “Servant” (Isa. 42:1) and “Lord” (John 13:13). The language of Colossians 3:24 makes this clear as a sunbeam: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” The “inheritance” is Heaven itself, salvation in its consummation. But is not salvation a free gift? Yes, indeed; nevertheless it has to be “bought” by its recipient (Isa. 55:1), yet “without money and without price.” Salvation is both a “gift” and a “reward.”

While it is true that Heaven cannot be earned by the sinner, it is equally true that Heaven is not for idlers and loiterers. God has to be “diligently sought.” To enter the strait gate the soul has to agonize (Luke 13:24). We are called upon to “labour” for that meat which endureth unto eternal life (John 6:27) and to enter into the heavenly rest (Heb. 4:11). Such efforts God “rewards,” not because they are meritorious, but because He deems it meet to recognize and recompense them. There are those who teach that in serving God we ought to have no “respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:26), but this verse refutes them, for the Apostle explicitly declares that this forms a necessary part of that truth which is to be believed in order to obey our pleasing God.

Heaven, or completed salvation, is spoken of as a “reward” to intimate the character of those to whom it is given, namely, the diligent labourer. Second, because it is not bestowed until our work is completed: 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. Third, to intimate the sureness of it: we may as confidently expect it as does the labourer who has been hired by an honest master: James 1:12. This “reward” is principally in the next life: Hebrews 11:16, 2 Corinthians 4:17—it is then that all true godliness shall be richly recompensed: Mark 10:29, 30. It only remains for us now to add that the *ground* on which God bestows the “reward” is the infinite merits of Christ, and out of respect unto His own promise. *That which* He “rewards” is the work of His own Spirit within us, so that we have no ground for boasting.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (v. 7). The Apostle now presents a concrete example which illustrates what he had said in verse 6. God’s dealings with Noah and the world in his time were plainly a sample and pledge of His dealing with the world in all ages, particularly so when its history is finally wound up. Inasmuch as God is the

Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, it necessarily follows that He is also the Revenger of all who despise Him. In the destruction of the old world, God showed His displeasure against sin (Job 22:15, 16); in the preservation of Noah, He made manifest the privileges of His own people (2 Peter 2:9). That the whole was a *pledge* and type is clear from 2 Peter 3:6, 7.

In the verse which is now before us three things claim attention. First, Noah's faith and its ground, namely the warning he had received from God. Second, the effects of his faith, namely, internally, the impulse of "fear"; externally, his obedience in making the ark under God's orders. Third, the consequences of his faith, namely, the saving of his house, the condemning of the world, his becoming heir of the righteousness which is by faith. But ere taking up these points, let us face and endeavour to remove a difficulty which some feel this verse raises. Let us put it this way: was Noah saved by his own works? We believe the answer is both Yes, and No. We beg the reader to exercise patience and prayerfully ponder what follows, and not cry out rank heresy and refuse to read further.

If Noah had not "prepared an ark" in obedience to God's command, would he not have perished in the flood? Then was it his own efforts which preserved him from death in the great deluge? No indeed; it was the preserving power of God. That ark had neither mast, sail, nor steering-wheel: only the gracious hand of the Lord kept that frail baroque from being splintered to atoms on the rocks and the mountains. Then what is the relation between these two things? This: Noah made use of the *means* which God had prescribed, and by His grace and power those means were made effectual unto his preservation. Must not the farmer toil in his fields? yet it is God alone who gives him the increase. Must I not observe the laws of hygiene and eat wholesome food? yet only as God blesses them to me am I kept in health. So it is in spiritual things: salvation by grace alone *does not exclude* the imperative necessity of our using the means which God has appointed and prescribed.

The temporal deliverance of Noah from the flood is undoubtedly an adumbration of the eternal deliverance of God's elect from the wrath to come: and here, as everywhere, the type is accurate and perfect. Nor can any sophistical quibbling honestly get rid of the fact that Noah's building of the ark—a most costly and arduous work!—was a means towards his preservation. Then does the case of Noah supply a clear example of salvation by works? Again we answer boldly, Yes and No. But the difficulty is greatly relieved if we bear in mind that Noah was *already a saved man* before God bade him build the ark! A reference to Genesis 6:8, 9 and a comparison with 6:14, 22 makes this unmistakably plain. But does not this fact overthrow all that has been said in the previous paragraphs? Not at all. The Christian's salvation is not only a past thing (2 Tim. 1:9), but a present (Phil. 2:12) and future (Rom. 13:11) thing too! We trust that the solution of the difficulty will be more evident as we proceed with our exposition of the verse.

As we have before pointed out, the first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, their design being to set forth the importance and excellency of faith. Then, in verses 4-7 we have an outline of the life of faith: the beginning of it is seen in verse 4, the nature of what it consists in verse 5, a warning and encouragement is supplied in verse 6, and the end of it is shown in verse 7. Before bringing before us the glorious goal which the life of faith reaches, verse 7 gives us the other side of what was before us in verse 5: there we saw faith elevating above a world of death, carrying the heart of its favoured possessor

into Heaven. But we are still in the world, and that is the place of opposition, of danger, and hence, of testing. Thus in verse 7 we are not only shown what faith obtains, but *how* it obtains it.

Now as we found it necessary to go back to Genesis 3 and 4 to interpret Hebrews 11:4, and to Genesis 5:24 to get the meaning of 11:5, so now we have to consult Genesis 6 in order to discover what is here adumbrated. Let the reader turn back to Genesis 6:5-22. There we find unsparing Divine judgment announced (v. 13), a way of deliverance presented to one who had “found grace” in the Lord’s eye (v. 14), faith’s obedience called for if escape was to be had from judgment (v. 14), the Divinely prescribed means to be used (v. 15); by employing those means deliverance was obtained. Now in like manner, a most solemn warning has been given us, an announcement of coming judgment: see 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:10-17—let the reader duly observe that both of these passages are found in Epistles addressed to God’s children.

In saying above that Hebrews 11:7 gives us the other side of what is spiritually set forth in verse 5, we mean that it gives us the *balancing* truth. It is most important to observe this, for otherwise we are very liable to entertain a mystical concept of verse 5 and become lopsided. Satan is ready to tell us that verse 5 presents to us a beautiful ideal, but one which is altogether impracticable for ordinary people—alright for preachers, but impossible for others. After reading our article on verse 5, many are likely to exclaim: We cannot be thinking of heavenly things all the time, we have our daily duties to attend to here on earth: the only way we could reach the standard of verse 5 would be by entering a monastery or convent, entirely secluding ourselves from the world; and surely God does not require this of us. No, indeed; that was the great mistake of the “Dark Ages.”

“By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” This gives us the other side of verse 5. It shows that we *have* duties to perform on earth, and intimates *how* they are to be discharged—by faith, in the fear of God, implicitly obeying His commands. And more: our present verse insists on the fact (now so little apprehended) that, the performing these duties, the rendering of faith’s obedience to God, is indispensably necessary to our very salvation. The “salvation” of the soul is yet future: note “saving” and *not* “salvation” in Hebrews 11:7, and also compare 1 Peter 1:5. In order to be saved from the destructive power of sin, the ruinous allurements of the world, and the devouring assaults of Satan, we *must* tread the path of obedience to Christ (Heb. 5:9), for only there do we escape these fatal foes. Let the reader prayerfully ponder Mark 9:43-50; Luke 14:26, 27, 33; Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 3:12, 14.

Hebrews 11:5 and 7 supplement each other. Verse 5 shows us that by the exercise of faith our affections are elevated above the earth and set upon things above. Verse 7 teaches us that our lives on earth are to be regulated by heavenly principles. The real Christian is a heavenly man living on earth *as* a heavenly man; that is to say, he is governed by spiritual and Divine principles, and not by fleshly motives and worldly interests. The Christian performs many of the same deeds as the non-Christian does, yet with a far different object and aim. All that I do should be done in obedience to God, in joyous response to His revealed will. Let us be specific and come to details. Let the Christian wife read Ephesians 5:22-24 and the husband 5:25-31, and let each recognize that in obeying the husband and loving the wife, they are *obeying God*. Let Christian employees ponder Ephesians 6:5-7, and recognize that in obeying their masters they are obeying the Lord;

contrariwise, in sulking or speaking against them, they murmur against the Lord!

Now such obedience to God's commandments in the ordinary relationships of life is necessary unto salvation. If this staggers the reader, let him contemplate the opposite. Those precepts and commands have been given us by God, and to disregard them is rebellion, and to refuse compliance is defiance; and no rebel against God can enter Heaven. Unless our wills have been broken, unless our hearts have been brought into subjection to God, we have no Scriptural warrant for concluding that He has *begun* a good work in us (Phil. 1:6). "He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). The only path which leads to Heaven is that of walking in obedience to God's commands.

Now the salvation of the soul lies at the *end* of that path. Does the reader exclaim, I thought it was at the beginning of it, and that none but a regenerate person could or would walk therein. From one standpoint that is quite true. When genuinely converted a sinner *is* saved from the eternal penalty of his sins, and *is* "delivered from the wrath to come." But is he there and then removed to Heaven? With very rare exceptions he is not. Instead, God leaves him here in this world. And this world is the place of danger, for temptations to return unto its ways and pleasures abound on every side. Moreover, the judgment of God hangs over it, and one day will burst upon and consume it. And who will escape that destruction? Only those who, like Noah, have a faith which is moved with fear and produces obedience. But it is now high time that we considered more closely the details of verse 7.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Ah, here is the key to our verse, hung right upon the very door of it. Like every other one of God's elect, Noah was saved by grace through faith; and yet not by a faith that was inactive—Ephesians 2:10 follows verse 9! *Faith* was the spring of all his works: a faith which was far more than an intellectual assent, one which was a supernatural principle that sovereign grace had wrought in him. God had determined to send a flood and destroy the wicked world, but ere doing so, He acquainted Noah with His purpose. He has done the same with us: see Romans 1:18. That Divine warning was the ground of Noah's faith. He argued not, nor reasoned about its incredibility; instead, he believed God. The *threatening*, as well as the promise of God, is the object of faith; the justice of God is to be eyed, as well as His mercy!

Human reason was altogether opposed unto what God had made known to Noah. Hitherto there had been no rain (Gen. 2:6), then why expect an overwhelming deluge? It seemed utterly unlikely God would destroy the whole human race, and His mercy be thus utterly swallowed up by His avenging justice. The threatened judgment was a long way off (120 years: Gen. 6:3), and during that time the world might well repent and reform. When he preached to men (2 Pet. 2:5) none believed his message: why then should he be so fearful, when every one else was at ease? To build an ark of such huge dimensions was an enormous undertaking, and, as well, would involve the scoffs of all his fellows. And even if the flood came, how could the ark float with such an immensely heavy burden—it had no anchor to stay her, no mast and sail to steady her, no steering-wheel to direct. Was it not quite impracticable, for Noah was quite inexperienced nautically. Moreover, for him and his family to dwell for an indefinite period in a sealed ark was far from a pleasant prospect unto flesh and blood. But against all these carnal objections faith offered a steady resistance, and *believed God!*

“Moved with fear.” This evidenced the reality and power of his faith, for saving faith not only “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), but in “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). A reverential awe of God is a sure fruit of saving faith. That “fear” acted as a salutary impetus in Noah and operated as a powerful motive in his building of the ark. “His believing the word of God, had this effect on him . . . a reverential fear it is of God’s threatenings, and not an anxious solicitous fear of the evil threatened. In the warning given him, he considered the greatness, the holiness, and the power of God, with the vengeance becoming those holy properties of His nature, which He threatened to bring on the world. Seeing God by faith under this representation of Him, he was filled with a reverential fear of Him. See Habakkuk 3:16, Psalm 119:120, Malachi 2:5” (J. Owen).

“Prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” As Matthew Henry says, “Faith first influences our affections and then our actions.” “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), particularly works of obedience. “Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). Privilege and duty are inseparably connected, yet duty will never be performed where faith is absent. Faith in Noah caused him to persevere in his arduous labours amid many difficulties and discouragements. Thus his building of the ark was a work of faith and patience, a labour of godly fear, an act of obedience, a means to his preservation—for God’s covenant with him (Gen. 6:18) did not preclude his diligent use of means; and a type of Christ. As it was by faith-obedience he prepared the ark, so by faith’s obedience came the “saving of his house.” God always honours those who honour Him. This temporal salvation was a figure of the eternal salvation unto which we are pressing forward, for note that the destruction of the anti-deluvians was an *eternal* one—for their spirits are now “in prison” (1 Peter 3:19)! Observe it is *our* responsibility to seek after our own salvation and those committed to us: see Acts 2:40, 2 Timothy 4:16.

“By the which he condemned the world.” The reference is to all that precedes. By his own example, by his faith in God’s warning, his reverential awe of God’s holiness and justice, his implicit and unflagging obedience in preparing the ark, Noah “condemned” the unbelieving, unconcerned, godless people all around him. One man is said to “condemn,” another when, by his godly actions, he shows what the other should do, and which by doing not, his guilt is aggravated; see Matthew 12:41, 42. The Sabbath-keeper “condemns” the Sabbath-breaker. He who abandons a worldly church and goes forth unto Christ outside the camp, “condemns” the compromiser. Noah’s diligent and costly labours increased the guilt of the careless, who rested in a false security. Though we cannot convert the wicked, yet we must be careful to set before them such an example of personal piety that they are left “without excuse.”

“And became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” The “righteousness” here referred to is that perfect obedience of Christ which God imputes unto all who savingly believe on His Son: Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This righteousness is sometimes called, absolutely, the “righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17, etc.), sometimes the “gift of righteousness . . . by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17), sometimes “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:9); in all of which our free and gratuitous justification by the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account through faith, is intended. In saying that Noah “became heir” of the righteousness, there may be a double significance. First, by faith’s obedience he *evidenced* himself *to be* a justified man (Gen. 6:9), as Abraham did when he offered up Isaac (James 2:21). Second, he *established* his

title to that righteousness which is here spoken of as an “inheritance”: this is in contrast from Esau who despised his. That righteousness which Christ purchased for His people is here denominated an “inheritance,” to emphasize the dignity and excellency of it, magnify the freeness of its tenure, to declare the certainty and inviolability of it.

The actual entrance upon our Inheritance is yet future. “That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the *hope* of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). The great question for each of us to settle is, Am I an “heir”? To help me do so, let me inquire, Have I the *spirit* of one? Is my main care to make sure that I have the *birth* right? Am I putting the claims of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33) above everything else? Have I such thoughts of the blessedness of my portion in Christ that nothing can induce me to sell or part with it (Heb. 12:16)? Is my heart wrapped up in that inheritance so that I am groaning within myself, “waiting for the adoption” (Rom. 8:23)? Am I walking by faith, with the fear of God upon me, diligently attending to His commandments, thereby condemning the world? If so, thrice blessed am I; and soon shall I be saved “to sin no more.”—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

11. *His return to Judea.*

In our last article we left David in the Cave of Adullam. An incident is recorded in 2 Samuel 23 which throws an interesting light on the spiritual life of our hero at this time. "And three of the thirty, chief, went down and came to David in the harvest-time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the hosts of Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink of it" (vv. 13-17).

No doubt the trials of his present lot had called to David's mind his happy life at home. The weather being hot, he expressed a longing for a drink from the family well of Bethlehem, though with no thought that any of his men would risk their lives to procure it for him. Yet this is precisely what happened: out of deep devotion to their outlawed captain, three of them fought their way through a company of the Philistines who were encamped there, and returned to David with the desired draught. Touched by their loyalty, stirred by their self-sacrifice, David felt that water obtained at such risk was too valuable for him to drink, and was fit only to be "poured out unto the Lord" as a "drink-offering." Beautifully has Matthew Henry made application of this, thus: "Did David look upon that water as very precious, which was got but with the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed His blood"?

We quote from another who has commented upon this incident. "There is something peculiarly touching and beautiful in the above scene, whether we contemplate the act of the three mighty men in procuring the water for David, or David's act in pouring it out to the Lord. It is evident that David discerned, in an act of such uncommon devotedness, a sacrifice which none but the Lord Himself could duly appreciate. The odor of such a sacrifice was far too fragrant for him to interrupt it in its ascent to the throne of the God of Israel. Wherefore he, very properly and very graciously, allows it to pass him by, in order that it might go up to the One who alone was worthy to receive it, or able to appreciate it. All this reminds us, forcibly, of that beautiful compendium of Christian devotedness set forth in Philippians 2:17, 18: 'Yea, and if I be poured out upon the sacrifice, and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for this cause ye also joy and rejoice with me.' In this passage, the Apostle represents the Philippian saints in their character as priests, presenting a sacrifice and performing a priestly ministration to God; and such was the intensity of his self-forgetting devotedness, that he could rejoice in his being poured out as a drink-offering upon their sacrifice, so that all might ascend, in fragrant odor to God." (C. H. M.)

Some commentators have denied that the above touching episode occurred during that section of David's history which we are now considering, placing it at a much later date. These men failed to see that 1 Chronicles 11:15 and 2 Samuel 23 recount things out of their chronological order. If the reader turn back to 1 Samuel 17:1, 19:8 etc. he will see

that the Philistines were quite active in making raids upon Israel at this time, and that David, not Saul, was the principal one to withstand them. But now he was no longer in the position to engage them. Saul, as we shall see in a moment, had dropped all other concerns and was confining his whole attention to the capture of David: thus the door was then wide open for the Philistines to continue their depredations. Finally, be it said, all that is recorded after David came to the throne, makes it altogether unlikely that the Philistines were then encamped around Bethlehem, still less that the king should seek refuge in the Cave of Adullam.

“And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold” (1 Sam. 22:3, 4). We are convinced that what has been before us in the above paragraphs supplies the key to that which is here recorded. In 22:1 we learn that “all his family” had come to David in the Cave. From 16:1 we learn that their home was in Bethlehem: but the Philistines were now encamped there (2 Sam. 23:14), so they could not return thither. David did not wish his parents to share the hardships involved by his wanderings, and so now he thoughtfully seeks an asylum for them. Blessed is it to see him, in the midst of his sore trials, “honouring his father and his mother.” Beautifully did this foreshadow what is recorded in John 19:26, 27.

While Saul was so bitterly opposed to David, there was no safety for his parents anywhere in the land of Israel. The deep exercises and anguish of David’s heart at this time are vividly expressed in Psalm 142, the Title of which reads, “A Prayer when he was in the Cave.” “I cried unto the Lord with my voice, with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before Him: I showed before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knowest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.” Blessed is it to mark the note of confidence in God in the closing verse.

“And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, let my father and mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you.” What was it induced David to trust his parents unto the protection of the Moabites? We quote, in part, from the answer given by J. J. Blunt in his very striking book “Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testaments.” “Saul, it is true, had been at war with them, whatever he might then be,—but so had he been with every people round about; with the Ammonites, with the Edomites, with the kings of Zobah. Neither did it follow that the enemies of Saul, as a matter of course, would be the friends of David. On the contrary, he was only regarded by the ancient inhabitants of the land, to which ever of the local nations they belonged, as the champion of Israel; and with such suspicion was he received amongst them, notwithstanding Saul’s known enmity towards him, that before Achish king of Gath, he was constrained to feign himself mad, and so effect his escape. . .

“Now what principle of preference may be imagined to have governed David when he committed his family to the dangerous keeping of the Moabites? Was it a mere matter

of chance? It might seem so, as far as appears to the contrary in David's history, given in the books of Samuel; and if the book of Ruth had never come down to us, to accident it probably would have been ascribed. But this short and beautiful historical document shows us a *propriety* in the selection of Moab above any other for a place of refuge to the father and mother of David; since it is there seen that the grandmother of Jesse, David's father, was actually a *Moabitess*; Ruth being the mother of Obed, and Obed the father of Jesse. And, moreover, that Orpah, the other Moabitess, who married Mahlon at the time when Ruth married Chilion his brother, remained behind in Moab after the departure of Naomi and Ruth, and remained behind with a strong feeling of affection, nevertheless, for the family and kindred of her deceased husband taking leave of them with tears (Ruth 1:14). She herself then, or at all events, her descendants and friends might still be alive. Some regard for the posterity of Ruth, David would persuade himself, might still survive amongst them. . .

“Thus do we detect, not without some pains, a certain fitness, in the conduct of David in this transaction which makes it to be a real one. A forger of a story could not have fallen upon the happy device of sheltering Jesse in Moab simply on the recollection of his Moabitish extraction two generations earlier; or, having fallen upon it, it is probable he would have taken care to draw the attention of his readers towards his device by some means or other, lest the evidence it was intended to afford of the truth of the history might be thrown away upon them. As it is, the circumstance itself is asserted without the smallest attempt to explain or account for it. Nay, recourse must be had to another book of Scripture, in order that the coincidence may be seen.”

Unto the king of Moab David said, “Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.” Slowly but surely our patriarch was learning to acquiesce in the appointments of God. Practical subjection unto the Lord is only learned in the school of experience: the theory of it may be gathered from books, but the actuality has to be hammered out on the anvil of our hearts. Of our glorious Head it is declared, “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). This word of David's also indicates that he was beginning to feel the need of waiting upon God for directions: how much sorrow and suffering would be avoided did *we* always do so. His “what God will do *for* me,” rather than “with me,” indicated a hope in the Lord.

“And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judea. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth” (v. 5). In the light of this verse, and together with 22:23, we may see that “the excellent” of the earth (Psa. 16:3) were more and more gathering to him who was a type of Christ in His rejection. Here we see the prophet of God with him, and shortly afterwards he was joined by the high priest—solemn it is to contrast the apostate Saul, who was now deserted by both. David had been humbled before God, and He now speaks again to him, not directly, but mediately. Two reasons may be suggested for this: David was not yet fully restored to Divine communion, and God was honouring His own institutions—the prophetic office: cf. 23:9-11.

“And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah.” It is quite clear from the language of this verse that at the time God now spoke to His servant through the prophet, he had not returned to the Cave of Adullam, but he sought temporary refuge in some stronghold of Moab. Now he received

a call which presented a real test to his faith. To appear more openly in his own country would evidence the innocency of his cause, as well as display his confidence in the Lord. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa. 37:23), yet the path He appoints is not the one which is smoothest to the flesh. But when God calls, we must respond, and leave the issue entirely in His hands.

“When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him); then Saul said unto his servants” etc. Here the Spirit takes up again another leading thread around which the history of 1 Samuel is woven. Having traced the movements of David since the leaving of his home (19:11, 12) up to the Cave of Adullam and his now receiving orders to return to the land of Judea, He follows again the evil history of Saul. The king had apparently set aside everything else, and was devoting himself entirely to the capture of David. He had taken up his headquarters at Gibeah: the “spear in his hand” showed plainly his blood-thirsty intentions.

The news of David’s return to Judea, soon reached the ears of Saul, and the fact that he was accompanied by a considerable number of men, probably alarmed him not a little, fearful that the people would turn to his rival and that he would lose his throne. His character was revealed again by the words which he now addressed to his servants (v. 7), who were, for the most part selected from his own tribe. He appealed not to the honour and glory of Jehovah, but to their cupidity. David belonged to Judah, and if he became king then those who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin must not expect to receive favours at his hands—neither rewards of land, nor positions of prominence in the army.

“All of you have conspired against me, and there is none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day” (v. 8). Here Saul charges his followers with having failed to reveal to him that which he supposed they knew, and of showing no concern for the circumstance in which he was then placed; this he construed as a conspiracy against him. His was the language of ungovernable rage and jealousy. His son is charged as being ringleader of the conspirators, merely because he would not assist in the murder of an excellent man whom he loved! True, there was a covenant of friendship between Jonathan and David, but no plot to destroy Saul, as he wildly imagined. But it is the nature of an evil person to regard as enemies those who are not prepared to toady to him or her in everything.

It was in response to Saul’s bitter words to his men, that Doeg the Edomite made known David’s secret visit to Ahimelech, and his obtaining victuals and the sword of Goliath (vv. 9, 10). Nothing was mentioned of the high priest being imposed upon, but the impression was left that he joined with David in a conspiracy against Saul. Let us learn from this that we may “bear false witness against our neighbor” as really and disastrously by maliciously *withholding* part of the truth, as by deliberately inventing a lie. When called upon to express our opinion of another (which should, generally, be declined, unless some good purpose is to be served thereby), honesty requires that we impartially recount what is in his favour, as well as what makes against him. Note how in His addresses to the seven churches in Asia, the Lord commended the good, as well as rebuked that which was evil.

The terrible sequel is recorded in verses 11-19. Ahimelech and all his subordinate priests were promptly summoned into the king’s presence. Though he was by rank the

second person in Israel, Saul contemptuously called the high priest “the son of Ahitub” (v. 12). Quietly ignoring the insult, Ahimelech addressed the king as “my lord,” thus giving honour to whom honor was due—the occupant of any office which God has appointed is to be honoured, no matter how unworthy of respect the man may be personally. Next, the king charged the high priest with rebellion and treason (v. 13). Ahimelech gave a faithful and unadorned account of his transaction with David (vv. 14, 15). But nothing could satisfy the incensed king but death, and orders were given for the whole priestly family to be butchered.

One of the sons of Ahimelech, named Abithar, escaped. Probably he had been left by his father to take care of the tabernacle and its holy things, while he and the rest of the priests went to appear before Saul. Having heard of their bloody execution, and before the murderers arrived at Nob to complete their vile work of destroying the wives, children and flocks of the priests, he fled; taking with him the ephod and the urim and thummim, and joined David (v. 20). It was then that David wrote the 52nd Psalm. Three things may be observed in connection with the above tragedy. First, the solemn sentence which God had pronounced against the house of Eli was now executed (2:31-36; 3:12-14)—thus the iniquities of the fathers were visited upon the children. Second, Saul was manifestly forsaken of God, given up to Satan and his own malignant passions, and was fast ripening for judgment. Third, by this cruel carnage David obtained the presence of the high priest, who afterwards proved a great comfort and blessing to him (23:6, 9-13; 30:7-10)—thus did God make the wrath of man to praise Him and work together for good unto His own.—A.W.P.

PRAYER

The Spirit of God exhorts the saints at least three times definitely in the New Testament to pray. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1); “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17); “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:8). This means no more and no less than that the life of God’s people should be a life of continual prayer. Prayer is the most mighty power in the Christian life under every circumstance, and the records of Scripture and history tell us that the meekest and strongest Christian, is the praying Christian. Prayer is not a matter of one or three times a day, but of every moment of the day, and every moment of a sleepless night. If we realized that the child of God in prayer is in close communion with God, with the Almighty Himself, then it will be clear to every one of us what a mighty power and weapon prayer is. If we are in close communion with God, we are in our appointed place; God has the place in our hearts which He rightly owns, and we please Him. Prayer means: to be in the dust before a thrice holy God on His throne, and in fear and holy reverence speaking with Him, pleading with Him, begging from Him, through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26), on the righteous claim which we have through the precious blood of Him, the only-begotten Son, who gave us access into the Holiest (Heb. 10:19, 20). It is prayer when we approach God to unburden our hearts, plead His promises, and ask for the things we need.

Now it is a sad fact that many of the prayers (so called) from God’s children do not go higher than the ceiling of the room where they are uttered, for the simple reason that many prayers are no prayers at all—especially when uttered in company, at prayer-meetings. How many of these prayers are only workings of the flesh, to make a fair show before the fellow saints!—to express Scriptural knowledge, to rebuke (or worse, sneer at) a fellow-saint; or dictate to God what He should do or not do. No lowliness of heart, no meekness of the spirit, but a proud and haughty attitude, often prevails in such meetings. The Holy Spirit is grieved and insulted, and quenched in the babes of Christ. An aged saint told me some years ago: Brother, if you want to find out Christians, go to the prayer-meetings!

As for private prayer, prayer in the closet, let every one of us examine himself how we in the past did approach God, and how many things we pleaded and asked whereby we, instead of honouring the Holy One, insulted Him. Well may we cry: “Lord teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Holy Writ teaches us that we must pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20): “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). Although every child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he is not always *in* the Spirit; for many times the Holy Spirit is grieved through sin. How we need, beloved brethren and sisters, the exhortation in Ephesians 4:30-32: “And grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.” I have been in homes and in prayer-meetings where people were reading the newspaper and talking the gossip of the day, till the so-called leader suggested, Brethren, let us begin to pray. Awful!

When we have grieved the Spirit, it is first of all needful to confess and forsake our sins before God (Prov. 28:13). Then we need to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance (Rom. 8:26, 27), that we should not use vain and idle words, which only condemn us and insult

God. It is many times regarded as very spiritual to hear a long prayer from a man. But the humble and true saint knows that, when we are really in the Spirit before a holy God on our knees, that as a rule we have not many words to use, although the heart is full; and also that, when we pray in the flesh, we have so many words that we hardly know how to stop. It will be good for every one of us to be reminded of the words from our Lord Jesus Christ: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do . . . be not ye therefore like unto them" (Matt. 6:7, 8). Prayer as well as worship must be in Spirit and in Truth. There must be a spiritual realization that we are before a thrice holy God; there must be a holy fear whereby we know that we cannot deceive God. We must be true, honest, and searching ourselves in the Truth; because we are liable to deceive ourselves and stand before God as liars. Prayer is a very solemn thing, beloved fellow-heirs.

It is good for us to observe that which is found in what is called the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6. This prayer gives us an example for shortness, and begins and ends with worship. In verse 9 God is addressed as "Father," and given honour and reverence. In verse 13 the prayer closes with honouring Him in His "kingdom, power and glory." If we approach God in prayer while in agony of bodily pain, or in agony of soul; in sorrow of bereavement, in pleading for our brethren with tears, or in need of temporal things or having a heart full of joy for the great things the Lord has done for us:—we must approach Him in the Spirit, in lowliness and in humiliation; and there must be *faith*. For "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Volumes could be written on the subject of prayer, but I believe for the child of God there are three points which he should specially take to heart for effective and prevailing prayer, in which God is honoured. First, what it means to pray in the name of Christ. Second, the importance of pleading the promises. Third, what are the things we need most to pray for?

Before our Lord was crucified and ascended to the Father, the people of God, even His disciples, did not pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in the last conversation with the disciples, the Lord knowing that His hour was come, that He should depart out of the world unto the Father, told them He would send the Spirit of truth (the Comforter, the Holy Spirit) and that whatsoever they should ask in His name, that would He do, that the Father might be glorified in the Son (John 14:13). And a little later He said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). All this was to be after His departure, when the Holy Spirit should dwell in them, and teach them through the fully revealed Word (1 John 2:27; John 17:17). It will be a matter of simple truth and need for the child of God when he bows down in prayer, that he begins by honouring God the Father. But we cannot honour God, when we pass by the Son! For it is written, "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him" (John 5:23). In other words, we have in prayer to acknowledge and honour the Son, otherwise we do not honour God, and He will not hear our prayer. Further: how do we know God as our Father? Through the Son: "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).

Multitudes know God, but not God the Father, because they do not know the Son. God's elect were "predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will . . . In whom (that is Jesus Christ) we have re-

demption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:5, 7). We are redeemed by the blood of Christ, by which we receive the adoption of sons; and by the Spirit of adoption we cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). Because we have received the spirit of a child, we know the Father. Moreover, Christ Jesus is appointed by God our High Priest: “who hath entered into Heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24); seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He was in all parts tempted like we are (yet in Him was no sin, He was spotless, undefiled);—”let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16). He is our Advocate with the Father, as Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). If we want to approach God in prayer, we have to do this through the Son, in the name of the Son: “no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). He is “*the door*” for the sheep.

It is very important in prayer to plead the promises of God. This will be plain when we read that “all the promises of God in Him (in Christ) are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us (2 Cor. 1:20). Exceeding great and precious are these promises which are given unto us by God’s Divine power, being added to the all things which pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: so that by these promises “ye might be partakers of the Divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3, 4). It is by experimentally enjoying these promises that we indeed, in a practical way, become partakers of the Divine nature; and this cannot be before we have also in a practical way escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. This will make it plain that conditions of responsibility are bound up with the promises of God, and that these conditions must be fulfilled by us in purpose of heart before we can plead, receive, and enjoy the promises. It is no use to plead a promise from God while we willfully and purposely walk against the will of God. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 7:1 we read, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from a filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” It must be clear to every unbiased mind that here are conditions laid down if we want to enjoy experimentally these promises. And what are “*these* promises” here spoken of? See 2 Corinthians 6:18, “And I will be Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and My daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” The condition for being able to enjoy experimentally these promises is: Cleanse ourselves, thus perfecting holiness in the fear of God; and this means practical separation from all that is not of God (see 2 Cor. 6:14 to 17).

The promise of the Lord’s return and redemption of the body is for them who fulfill the condition laid down in Hebrews 9:28: “*unto them that look for Him* shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” We are His friends if we do whatsoever He commands us (John 15:14). His promise is: He will give, and open to us; but we must ask and knock; (Matt. 7:7, 8). It is rather marvelous to hear true children of God pleading promises from God without taking heed to the conditions of responsibility which are bound up with every promise. The promise for the unregenerated man not to perish and have everlasting life is: that he must “believe” (John 3:15, 16). Who hath everlasting life? He that believeth on the Son (John 3:36). It is only when the sinner believes, that he experimentally enjoys the promise of everlasting life. And as for believers, they who are God’s children, He forgiveth our sins and cleanseth us from all unrighteousness *if* we

confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Who shall have mercy? He who confesseth and forsaketh his sins (Prov. 28:13). The promise of being blessed is given repeatedly in Holy Writ. But who will be “blessed”? He that considereth the poor (Psa. 41:1); he that is poor in spirit; the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, etc. (see Matt. 5:3 to 11). He will keep him in perfect peace. Whom? “Whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa. 26:3). The Lord said to Abram, “I will make thee a great nation, and I will bless thee”; but the condition was, “Get thee out” (Gen. 12:1, 2). The Lord’s promise is, that He will honour thee, *if thou honourest Him* (1 Sam. 2:30).

It is very needful for God’s people to study the promises of God that we may know *what* to ask in prayer. Many things are asked in prayer which God never promised, and many promises are asked while we are totally ignorant of the claims of God bound up with them. One of the conditions in prayer is, that we should ask according to God’s will; and when we do so, we have His promise that “He heareth us” (1 John 5:14). We must not ask the fulfilling of any promise to consume it on our own lusts, but always ask it to the glory of God. And it is needful that we should have fulfilled in purpose and determination of heart, the conditions, the responsibility, which is bound up with the promise we ask for.

And “According to your *faith* be unto you” (Matt. 9:29). “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20). The promises of God are great, “Exceeding great,” and never too great that we could not ask for, or God would not give. But at the same time we have to remember that conditions of our responsibility are inseparably bound up with them. God does not give like a foolish father to a spoiled child. O, no, Brethren, God is holy, and never will He sanction sin. He may show mercy to us, and He does—otherwise all of us would be consumed; but His command is, “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” (Isa. 52:11).

What are the things we most need to pray for in these days of corruption, selfishness, and exaltation of man? What should we specially pray for in these last days, when *individual* faithfulness to God alone has value? First of all let me take it for granted that God is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe; that He is the Giver of all good and perfect things; that we are only poor worms, at His entire mercy, and consequently we have to ask for everything—bread and water, as well as desired fellowship with our brethren and sisters; for “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). But the child of God, as belonging to the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13), and being still in the world, although he belongs not to it (John 17:16), is commanded to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). And as such, there are special things he needs to pray for. 1. A holy life, which in a practical way means obeying the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ—”Follow Me.” And if we truly are desirous of following Him, we need first of all, meekness and lowliness in heart and spirit. Thus should we pray that God will cause us daily, hourly, momentarily, to come to Christ and take His yoke upon us and learn of Him (Matt. 11:29).

2. As our heart is still prone to be deceitful and desperately wicked, so that we do not know what is in it, we need to pray, “Search me O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:23). 3. As each of us is very ignorant of the statutes of the Lord, and especially of the way to walk in them, we need to pray “Teach me O Lord, the way of

Thy statutes” (Psa. 119:33). 4. As we all know, or ought to know, the commandments given to us in Holy Writ, but fail to keep them as the Lord bids, we have to pray, “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:35). 5. God’s children read His Word, but show repeatedly by their actions that they do not really believe it. The reason of which is that God’s Word is not established, or rooted in their hearts. Therefore we have to pray, “establish Thy Word unto Thy servant” (Psa. 119:38). 6. We claim to have faith in God, but when our faith is put to the test we mostly fail miserably. Therefore we should pray, Lord, increase my faith, purify, refine it, that it may prove able to remove mountains, and to rejoice in the Lord although I should be desolate like Job (see Habakkuk 3:17, 18). 7. As God’s children we are predestinated and called to be conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29), but in our daily lives we are all far from it, otherwise we should be more hated and despised like Christ. We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb. 12:4). Therefore we should pray, Father, make us more and more conformed to the image of Thy dear Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The praying for these things in the Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ, will experimentally prove the truth of “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (for our daily common needs) *shall* be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33 and context). God giveth always more than we ask for, and I firmly believe that in the life of the Christian everything hangs on the needful qualities as mentioned in these seven points.

Now for a short summary of seven other points which are requisite for effectual and prevailing prayer. 1. Separation from all known sins, by confessing and forsaking these in purpose of heart. If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us (Psa. 66:18); if He did, He would be sanctioning sin. 2. Entire dependence upon the finished work of Christ and pleading His precious blood (Heb. 10:10, 1 John 1:7). 3. We must ask the Spirit of God to lead us in prayer, pray for us; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26). 4. Faith in God’s Word and His promises. Not to believe Him is to make Him a liar or perjurer (Heb. 11:6, John 3:33). 5. Asking according to His will (1 John 5:14). We must not seek a gift from God to consume it upon our own lust (James 4:3). 6. We must offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, this is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks in His name (Heb. 13:15). Prayer as well as worship must be in Spirit and Truth; if not, it is of the flesh, and is a lie. 7. There must be waiting on God, waiting for God, as the husbandman has long patience to wait for the harvest (James 5:7; Luke 18:1 to 8). By A. Klooster. (Engaged in evangelistic work in Holland: looking to the Lord alone for the supply of every need. A.W.P.)

ASSURANCE

III. Its Attainment.

In writing to a company of the saints an Apostle was inspired to declare, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work *in* you will perform (or "finish") it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). *That* is what distinguishes the regenerate children of God from empty professors, from those who while having a "name to live" are really spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1). This is what differentiates true Christians from deluded ones. And in what does this "good work" which is "begun" *within* the saved consist? It is variously described in different Scriptures. It is the heart being purified by faith (Acts 15:9). It is the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is the laws of God being written in their hearts (Heb. 8:10). Thus, the *nature* of Christian assurance is a well-founded knowledge that I am a child of God. The *basis* of this assurance that there is an unmistakable agreement between *my* character, experience, and life, and the description which Holy Writ furnishes of the characters, experiences and lives of God's children. Therefore, the *attainment* of assurance is by an impartial scrutiny of myself and an honest comparing of myself with the Scriptural marks of God's children.

A reliable and satisfactory assurance can only be attained or reached by means of a thorough self-examination. "O therefore, Christians, rest not till you can call this rest your own. Sit not down without assurance. Get alone, and bring thy heart to the bar of trial: force it to answer the interrogatories put to it to set the qualifications of the saints on one side, and the qualifications of thy self on the other side, and then judge what resemblance there is between them. Thou hast the same Word before thee, by which to judge thyself now, as thou shalt be judged by at the great day. Thou mayest there read the very articles upon which thou shalt be tried; try thyself by these articles now. Thou mayest there know beforehand on what terms men shall then be acquitted or condemned. Try now whether thou art possessed of that which will acquit thee, or whether thou be in the condition of those that will be condemned; and accordingly acquit or condemn thyself. Yet be sure thou judge by a true touchstone, and mistake not the Scripture description of a saint, that thou neither acquit nor condemn thyself by mistake" (The Saint's Everlasting Rest, Rich. Baxter, 1680).

The need for such self-examination is indeed great, for multitudes are deceived; quite sure that they are Christians, yet without the marks of one. "They say they are saved, and they stick to it they are, and think it wicked to doubt it; but yet they have no reason to warrant their confidence. There is a great difference between presumption and full assurance. Full assurance is reasonable: it is based on solid ground. Presumption takes for granted, and with brazen face pronounces that to be its own to which it has no right whatever. Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If thy heart be renewed, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be a thorough change of mind in thee; if thou be born again, then hast thou reason to rejoice: but if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit, then thy saying 'I am saved' is but thine own assertion, and it may delude, but it will not deliver thee" (C. H. Spurgeon on 1 Chron. 4:10).

O what efforts Satan puts forth to keep people from this vitally important and all-necessary work of self-examination. He knows full well that if many of his deceived vic-

tims set about the task in earnest, they would soon discover that no miracle of Divine grace has been wrought in them, and that this would cause them to seek the Lord with all their hearts. He knows too that real Christians would gain much advantage against the power of indwelling sin would they but thoroughly search their own hearts. Many are diverted from this wholesome work by the evil example set by so many who now bear the name of Christ. Not a few argue, If he or she (that claims to have been a Christian so much longer and appears to know the Bible so much better), who is so worldly, so governed by “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” is sure he is bound for Heaven, why should I be concerned?

But *the state of men’s hearts* is what holds so many back from the discharge of this duty. Some are so ignorant that they know not what self-examination is, nor what a servant of God means when he seeks to persuade them to “*prove your own selves*” (2 Cor. 13:5). Others are so much in love with sin and have such a dislike for the holy ways of God, they dare not venture on the trial of their state, lest they should be forced from the course they so much relish, to one which they hate. Others are so taken up with their worldly affairs, and are so busy providing for themselves and their families they say, “I pray Thee have me excused” (Luke 14:18). Others are so slothful that they cannot be induced on any consideration to be at those pains which are necessary in order to know their own hearts.

Pride holds many back. They think highly of themselves. They are so sure of *their* salvation, so thoroughly convinced that all is right between their souls and God, they deem any search after *proof*, and testing of themselves by Scripture to see if they *have* the marks of those who are “new creatures in Christ Jesus,” as quite unnecessary and superfluous. They have been brought up in a religious atmosphere where none of those professing the name of Christ expressed any doubts about their state. They have been taught that such doubtings are of the Devil, a calling into question the veracity of God’s Word. They have heard so many affirm “I *know* that my Redeemer liveth,” they felt it their duty to echo the same, forgetting that he who first uttered those words (Job 19:25) was one of whom God said, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8).

Tens of thousands have been taught that it is wrong for the Christian to look within himself, and they have blindly followed the advice of such physicians “of no value.” How can it be wrong for me to examine my heart to see whether or not God *has* written His laws upon it (Heb. 8:10)? How can it be wrong for me to look and see whether or not God *has* begun a “good work” *in* me (Phil. 1:6)? How can it be wrong for me to test myself by the Parable of the Sower to see *which* of its four soils represents *my* heart? How can it be wrong to measure myself by the Parable of the Virgins, and ascertain whether or not the “oil” of regenerating and sanctifying grace is within the “vessel” of my soul (Matt. 25:4)? Since God Himself declares, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9), how can it be wrong for me to make sure that *I am* indwelt by Him?

Rightly did an eminent Puritan say, The Scripture abounds in commands and cautions for our utmost diligence in our search and inquiry, whether we are made partakers of Christ or not, or whether His Spirit dwell in us or not; which argue both the difficulty of attaining an assured confidence herein, as also the danger of our being mistaken, and yet the certainty of a good issue upon the diligent and regular use of means to that purpose”

(John Owen on Heb. 3:14, 1670). Alas, this is what has been so strenuously opposed by many during the last two or three generations. An easy-going religion, well calculated to be acceptable unto the slothful, has been zealously propagated, representing the salvation of the soul and assurance of the same as a very simple matter.

It is very evident to one who has been taught of God that the vast majority of present-day evangelists, tract-writers and “personal workers,” do not believe one-half of what Holy Writ declares concerning the spiritual impotency of the natural man, or the absolute necessity of a miracle of grace being wrought within him before he *can* savingly turn to Christ. Instead, they erroneously imagine that fallen man is a “*free moral agent*,” possessing equal power to accept Christ as to reject Him. They suppose all that is needed is information and coercion: to preach the Gospel and persuade men to believe it. But have they never heard of the Holy Spirit? O yes, and *say* they believe that only He can effectually convict of sin and regenerate. But do their actions agree with this? They certainly do not, for not only is there practically no definite waiting upon God and an earnest seeking from Him the power of His Spirit, but they sally forth and speak and write to the unsaved as if the Holy Spirit had no existence.

Now just as it is plainly *implied* by such “novices” that lost sinners can receive Christ any time they make up their minds to do so, just as they are constantly told that nothing more is needed than to believe that Christ died for them and rest on John 3:16 and salvation is theirs, so the idea has been inculcated that the professing Christian may enjoy the full assurance of faith any time he wishes and that nothing more is required for this than to “rest on John 5:24” etc. One verse of Holy Scripture is sufficient to give the lie to this popular delusion: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16). If the written promises of God were sufficient of themselves to produce assurance, then what need is there for the third person of the Godhead to “bear witness” with the spirit of the Christian that he *is* a child of God?

As this verse is virtually given no place at all in modern ministry, let us ponder its terms: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The clear implication of these words is that the actual existence of the saint’s sonship is, at times at least, a matter of painful uncertainty, and that the supernatural agency of the Spirit is required to authenticate the fact, and thus allay all fear. To be fully assured of the amazing fact that God is my spiritual Father, demands something more than the testimony of our own feelings or the opinion of men; and, let us reverently add, something more than resting upon a Divine promise. Millions have “rested on” the words “*this is My body*,” and no argument could persuade them that the bread upon the Lord’s table was not actually changed into Christ’s literal flesh.

Who so competent to authenticate the work of the Spirit in the heart as the Spirit Himself? What, then, is the merit of His testimony? Not by visions and voices, nor by any direct inspiration of new revelation of truth. Not by bringing some verse of Scripture (of which I was not thinking) vividly before the mind, that my heart is made to leap for joy. If the Christian had no surer grounds that *that* to stand upon, he might with despair. Satan can bring a verse of Scripture before the mind (Matt. 4:6), and produce in his victims strong emotions of joy, and impart a false peace to his soul. Therefore the witness of the Spirit to be decisive and conclusive, must be something which the Devil cannot duplicate. And what is that? This: Satan cannot beget Divine grace and impart real holiness to the heart.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit.” To “bear witness with” is a legal term, and signifies to produce valid and convincing evidence. “Our spirit” here has reference to the renewed conscience. Concerning natural men it is said, “which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their *conscience* also *bearing witness*” (Rom. 2:15). But the conscience of the natural man is partial, dim-sighted, stupid. Grace makes it tender, pliant, and more able to do its office. The desire of the regenerate man, and unto which he exercises himself, is “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). Where such a conscience is (by grace) maintained, we can say with the Apostle, “This is our rejoicing (what? resting on John 3:16? No, but) *the testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity . . . we have had our conversation in the world” (2 Cor. 1:12).

Was the beloved Paul off the right track when he found something *in himself* which afforded ground for “rejoicing”? According to many present-day teachers (?) he was. It is a great pity that these men do not give less attention to human writings, and more to the Holy Scriptures, for then they would read “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man shall be satisfied from himself” (Prov. 14:14). If that text be despised because it is in the O. T., then we also read in the N. T. “but let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have *rejoicing in himself* alone, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4). Once more, “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth: And *hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and *shall assure our hearts before Him*” (1 John 3:18, 19). What is the method which God here sets before His children for assuring their hearts before Him? Not in telling them to appropriate one of His promises, but to *walk in the Truth*, and then their own spirit will bear witness to their Divine sonship.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” In addition to the testimony of a renewed conscience which is enjoyed by the Christian when he (by grace) is walking in the Truth, the Spirit adds His confirmation. How? First, He has laid down clear marks in the Scriptures by which we may settle the question: “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14)—why tell us this, if “resting on John 5:24” be all that is necessary? Second, by working such graces in the saints as are peculiar to God’s children: in Galatians 5:22 these graces are expressly designated “the fruit of the Spirit.” Third, by His spiritual consolation: “Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31 and cf. Rom. 15:13). Fourth, by producing in the Christian the affections which dutiful children bear to a wise and loving Parent (Rom. 8:15).

To sum up: the blessed Spirit witnesses along with our spirit that we are the children of God by enabling us to discern (in the light of Scripture) the *effects* and *fruits* of His supernatural operation within us. The breathings of the renewed heart after holiness, the pantings after a fuller conformity to the image of Christ, the strivings against sin, are all inspired by Him. Thus, by begetting in us the Divine nature, by teaching us to deny “un-godliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12), the Spirit conducts us to the sure conclusion that we are the children of God. Thereby He shows us there is a real correspondency between our experience and revealed truth. “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us *of His Spirit*” (1 John 4:13).

IV. Its Subjects.

Under this head we propose to briefly consider the character of those persons to

whom the privilege of Christian assurance rightfully belongs. Here again there are two extremes to be guarded against. On the one hand is that class who have been deceived by the slogan “believe you are saved, and you *are* saved,” which is best met by pointing out that genuine assurance is never any greater than is our *evidence* of the same. On the other hand are those who are fearful that such evidence is unattainable while the body of sin indwells them. To such we would ask, Is it impossible to ascertain whether or not the health of your body is sound? Are there not certain symptoms and signs which are a clear index? If I were doubtful, and feared that some fatal disease was beginning to grip me, I would seek a physician. Were he to merely look at me and then lightly say, Your health is good, I would leave him and seek another more competent. I would request a thorough overhauling: the taking of my blood-pressure, the sounding of my heart, the testing of my other vital organs. So it should be with the soul.

In seeking to determine from God’s Word who are entitled to Christian assurance, let us ask and answer a number of questions. Who are they with whom the great God dwells? “with him also that is of (not an haughty and boastful, but) a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 57:15); “to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth at My Word*” (Isa. 66:2)—do you? or do you joke over or argue about its sacred contents? Whom does God really forgive? They who “repent” and are “converted” (Acts 3:19), that is, they who turn their backs upon the world and sinful practices, and yield to Him; those in whose hearts God puts His “*laws*” and writes them in their minds, in consequence of which they love, meditate upon, and keep His commandments: note how Hebrews 10:16 precedes 10:17!

Who is the man whom Christ likened unto one who built his house upon the rock? Not merely him who “believes,” but “whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them” (Matt. 7:24). Who are truly born again? “Everyone that doeth righteousness” (1 John 2:29); they who “love the brethren” with such a love as is described in 1 John 3:17, 18. To whom does God experimentally reveal the eternal purpose of His grace? “The secret of the Lord is with them that *fear Him*, and He will show *them* His covenant” (Psa. 25:14). “To him that ordereth his conservation aright will I show the salvation of God” (Psa. 50:23). What are the identifying marks of a saving faith? One which “purifies the heart” (Acts 15:9), “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4): only thus may I know that *my* faith is a living and spiritual one.

The birth of the Spirit can only be known from its effects (John 3:8). Thus, it is by comparing what God in His Word, has promised to do *in* His elect with what His Spirit has, or has not, wrought in my heart, that I can ascertain whether assurance of salvation be my legitimate portion. *This* is “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). Wondrous things has God prepared “for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9); how important then for me to make sure that I love Him. Many suppose that because they have (or had) a dread of eternal punishment, that therefore they love God. Not so: true love of God is neither begotten by fears of Hell nor hopes of Heaven: if I do not love God for what He is in Himself, then I do not love Him at all. And if I love Him, my desire, my purpose, my aim, will be to *please* Him in all things. Much might be added to this section of our subject, but we trust that sufficient has been said to enable exercised and honest souls to learn how to identify those whom Scripture teaches are entitled to the assurance of salvation.—A.W.P. God willing, to be continued.

CONVICTION OF SIN

Conviction is an embryo of the new creature: if it come to a perfect birth, it brings forth salvation to your souls; if it fails, you are finally lost. It is of infinite moment, therefore, to everyone, to be tender of those convictions of conscience. It is true that conviction and conversion are two things: there may be conviction without conversion, though there cannot be conversion without conviction. The blossoms on the trees in the spring of the year cannot properly be called fruit, but are rather the rudiments of fruit, or something in order to fruit. If they open kindly and knit or set firmly, proper fruit follows them; but if blight or a frosty morning kill them, no fruit is to be expected. Thus it is here. Great care, therefore, ought to be taken about the preservation and success of convictions, both by the soul itself that is under them, and by all others who are concerned about them.

1. What care the soul itself should have on whom convictions are wrought. Beware, friends, how you quench them or hinder their operations, lest you hinder as much as in you lies, the formation of Christ in your souls. The life of your souls is bound up in the life of your convictions. I know it is hard for men to dwell with their own convictions: guilt and wrath are sad subjects for men's thoughts to dwell upon; but it is far better to dwell with the thoughts of sin and wrath here, than to lie under them in Hell forever. You may be freed from your convictions and your salvation together. Be not too eager for peace—a good trouble is better than a false peace. And on the other hand, beware that your convictions turn not into discouragements to faith: this will cross the proper intention of them; they are Christ's knockings for entrance, and were never intended to be bars or stumblingblocks, but steps in your way to Christ.

2. Let all that are concerned about convicted souls beware what counsels they give and what rules they prescribe, lest you destroy all in the bud. There are two errors too commonly committed: one is *excess*, persuading souls under trouble of conscience that there is no coming to Christ for them unless they are so and so prepared, humbled just to such a degree: this is dangerous counsel; it overheats the troubled conscience, and keeps the soul from its proper present duty and remedy. I am sure Paul and Silas took no such course with the convicted jailer (Acts 16:31), nor Peter with the three thousand wounded consciences (Acts 2:38). Nor do I find where God has stated the time and degree of spiritual troubles, so that there must be no approaches to Christ in the way of faith, until they have suffered them so long and to such a height. If they have embittered sin to the soul, and made it see the necessity of a Saviour, it cannot move too soon after Christ in the way of faith. Let no man set bounds where God sets none.

There is another error committed in *defect*: when promises and comfort are applied before the nature of faith is known, or one act of reliance put forth towards Christ. These hasty comforts come to nothing; they will not, they cannot stand. It is a dangerous thing to apply Gospel cordials, and pour out the precious ointments of the promises upon those who were never heart-sick for sin—address to such persons upon every slight trouble, which is but as an early dew, the peculiar consolations of penitent and believing souls. How many such empirics (quacks) are there in every place! Such as the prophet Jeremiah complains of, "They have healed also the hurt of My people slightly, saying Peace; when there is no peace" (6:14). Remember, that the foundation is now laying for eternity, and that this is the time of deep consideration; men must ponder the terms and count the cost, and deliberately accept and close this with Christ, before the consolations of the promises can properly be administered to them.

What a blessing is a rousing and faithful ministry among a people! By such a ministry Christ knocks powerfully, this is one of the greatest blessings God can bestow upon a people, when He sends among them powerful and judicious preachers of the Gospel, under whose ministry their conscience cannot sleep quietly. These are the instruments by which Christ knocks at men's hearts; and as for those who sew pillows for drowsy sinners, to sleep quietly upon (Eze. 3:8), the Lord owns them not as His: "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee, and they have not discovered (exposed) thine iniquity" (Lam. 2:14). It is true that those ministers that give men no rest and quietness in their sins, must expect but little rest and quietness themselves. What is it for ministers to preach home to the consciences of others, but to pull down the rage of the world upon their own heads? But certainly you will have cause to bless God through eternity, for casting your lot under such a ministry; and the Lord accounts such a mercy sufficient to recompense any outward affliction that may lie heavy upon you.

3. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Then let me exhort and persuade you by all the regard and love you have for your souls, by all the fears you have of incensed wrath of the great and terrible God, that you forthwith set your convictions at liberty, and loose all the Lord's prisoners that lie bound within you: "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke" (Job 36:18). O stifle the voice of conscience no more, slight not the softest whisper or least intimation of conscience; reverence and obey its voice.

1. Till you set free your convictions Satan will not let you go: he binds you, while you bind them. Here is the command of God and the command of Satan in competition. Let My truths go free, which thou holdest in unrighteousness, says Jehovah; bind and suppress them, says Satan, or they will deprive thee of the liberty and pleasures of thy life. While thou slightest the voice of God and conscience, dost thou not avowedly declare thyself the bondslave of Satan? "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom you obey?" (Rom. 6:16). Dare not to take one step further in the way of known sin, says conscience; continue not at thy peril in such a dangerous state, after I have so clearly convinced and warned thee of it. Fear not, says Satan, if it be ill with thee, it will be with millions. Now, I say, thy obedience to Satan's commands declares thee, all this while, to be a poor enslaved captive to him, acted on and carried according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now worketh in the children of disobedience.

2. Until you obey your convictions, you are confederates with Satan in a desperate plot against your own souls; you join with Christ's great and avowed enemy to dishonour Him. Two things make you confederates with Satan against your own souls. First, your *consent* to this project for your damnation; for so your own conscience out of Scripture informs you it is: consent makes you a party. Second, your *concealment* of this plot brings you in as a party with him. Confess thy sin and bewail it, says conscience: not so, says pride and shame; how shall I look men in the face if I do so? Do not you, in all this, believe Satan and make God a liar? Do not you act as men who hate their own souls and love death? "But he that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate Me love death" (Prov. 8:36). O it is a dreadful thing for men to be accessory to their own eternal ruin, and that after fair warning and notice given them by their own conscience. Satan, be his power what it will, cannot destroy you without your own consent.

3. While you go on stifling convictions and turning away your ears from calls to righteousness, you cannot be pardoned; you are yet in your sins, and the guilt of them lies at your door. You see what the terms of remission are: “Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7). And again, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). You see by these, and many more plain Scripture testimonies, that there can be no hope of remission, while you go on in the path of rebellion, concealing, yea, and persisting in known wickedness. There is a necessary and inseparable connection between repentance and remission: “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31); “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name” (Luke 24:47).

4. You can never have peace of conscience while you keep convictions prisoners. A man’s conscience is his best friend or his worst enemy; thence are the sweetest comforts, and thence are the bitterest sorrows. It is a dreadful thing for a man to lie with a cold sweating horror upon his panting bosom. And this, or which is worse, obduracy and stupidity must be the case of them who hold the truth in unrighteousness. As Israel could have no peace till Achan was destroyed, so thou shalt have no peace while thy sin is covered and hid. Deliver up thyself, if thou lovest peace, into the hand of thy own convictions, and then thou art in the true way to peace.

Do not some of you stand convicted by your own consciences this day, that your hearts and practices are vastly different from those of the true people of God among whom you live, and whose character you read in Scripture? Do not your consciences tell you, that you never took the pains for your salvation which you see them take; that there are some in your families, nay, possibly in your bosoms, who are serious and holy while you are vain and earthly—who are on their knees wrestling with God, while you are about the things of the world? And does not your conscience sometimes whisper thus into thine ear: Soul, thou art not right, something is wanting, to make thee a Christian. If it be so, let me advise thee to hearken diligently to that voice of conscience; do not venture to the judgment seat of God in such a case. Ponder that verse, “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (Matt. 21:32). Let the disparity your conscience shows you between your own course and that of others, awaken you to more diligence and seriousness about your own salvation. How canst thou come from thy vain recreations, and find a wife or child in prayer, and thy conscience not smite thee? It may be they have been mourning for thy sins, whilst thou hast been committing them.

Directions. 1. Fail not to put every conviction into speedy execution. Do not delay; it is a critical hour, and delays are exceedingly hazardous. Convictions are fixed and secured in men’s souls four ways. First, by deep and serious consideration: “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies” (Psa. 119:59). Second, by earnest prayer: thus Saul, after his first convictions, fell on his knees: “Behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). The breath of prayer forments and nourishes the sparks of conviction, that they be not extinct. Third, by diligent attendance on the Word. The Word begets conviction, and the Word can, through God’s blessing, preserve it. Fourth, by performing, without delay,

the duty thou are commanded of: "For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straight-way forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James 1:23, 24). Take the sense thus: a man looks into the glass in the morning, and perhaps he sees a spot on his face, or a disorder in his hair or clothes, and thinks within himself, I will rectify it; but being gone from the place, one thing or other diverts his mind, he forgets what he saw, and goes all the day with a spot on his face, never thinking of it more. O brethren, delays are dangerous, sin is deceitful (Heb. 3:13), Satan is subtle (2 Cor. 11:3), and in this way he gains his point. This motto may be written on the tomb of most that perish, "Herein lies one that was destroyed by delays."

Your life is uncertain, so are the strivings of the Spirit. Besides there is a mighty advantage in the first impulse of the soul. When thy heart is once up in warm affections and resolutions, the work may be easily done, see 2 Chronicles 29:36, for what advantage there is in a present warm frame. Besides, the nature of these things is too serious and weighty to be postponed and delayed. You cannot get out of the danger of Hell, or into Christ, too soon. Moreover, every repetition of sin after conviction greatly aggravates it. For it is in sinning as in numbering: if the first be one, the second is ten, the third a hundred. You can never have a fitter season than the present.

2. If you would be clear from this great wickedness of holding the truth in unrighteousness, see that you reverence the voice and authority of your conscience, and resolve with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live" (27:6). There are two considerations fitted to beget reverence to the voice of conscience. (a) Conscience obeyed and kept pure and inviolate is thy best friend on earth. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Cor. 1:12). What comforted Hezekiah on his supposed deathbed, but the testimony his conscience gave of his integrity?—"I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done good in Thy sight" (2 Kings 20:3). Solomon says, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, and a good man shall be satisfied from himself" (Prov. 14:14). Mark the opposition: conscience gives the backslider a heart full of sorrow, while the heart of the upright man is full of peace. He is satisfied from himself; that is, from his own conscience, which though it be not the original spring, yet is the conduct at which he drinks peace, joy, and satisfaction.

(b) Conscience wounded and abused will be our worst enemy: "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?" (Prov. 18:14). Could Judas bear it? What is the torment of Hell, but the worm that dies not; and what is the worm, but the remorse of conscience?—"Where their worm dieth not, and (in addition A.W.P.) the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). The primitive Christians would rather be cast to the lions than into the power of an enraged conscience. O if men did but fear and reverence their own consciences; if they exercised themselves to have always a conscience void of offence, as Paul did, (Acts 24:16), then would they be clear of this great sin of holding the truth in unrighteousness.

3. If you would escape the guilt and danger of holding God's truth in unrighteousness, keep your hearts under the awful sense of the Day of Judgment, when every secret thing will be brought to light, and conscience like a register-book will be opened and examined. The due consideration of that Day gives the conscience a sevenfold defense against sin. First, it incites every man to get real, solid grace, and not rest in an empty

profession; and this secures us from formal hypocrisy, that we should not be found foolish virgins (Matt. 25:3). Second, it excites us to the diligent improvement of our talents, that we be not found slothful servants, neglecting any duty to which God and conscience calls us (Matt. 25:21). Third, it confirms and establishes us in the ways of God, that we would not conscience by apostasy (1 John 2:28). Fourth, it is a loud call to every man to repentance, and not to lie stupid and senseless under guilt (Acts 17:30, 31). Fifth, it is a powerful antidote against formality in religion, the general and dangerous disease of professors (Matt. 7:22, 23). Sixth, it excites holy fear and watchfulness in the whole course of life (1 Peter 1:17). Seventh, it puts us not only on our watch, but on our knees in fervent prayer (1 Peter 4:7).—John Flavel, 1689.

WRONGS RIGHTED

How many Christians there are who seldom get any real, definite, and remarkable answers to their prayers! How many, if they were frank, would have to acknowledge, "For some reason or other God does not answer *my* prayers." This ought to occasion much concern, exercise of conscience, and searching of heart before Him. God is more willing to give, than His people are to receive: He is their Father, and delights to make them happy: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). But God is *holy* and will not compromise with our sins, nor condone that which is evil; and He requires us to be holy too: 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

Yes, the sad fact remains that many Christians do not have the ear of God. Where this is the case, something is wrong in their lives, something which has "grieved the Spirit," and *choked* the channel of blessing. To them it has to be said, "Your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jer. 5:25). Nor is that word to be restricted to the present. I may be walking in the path of obedience today, and yet there may be something in the past which is hindering my entering into God's best for me now.

It behooves every Christian who is not regularly receiving striking and blessed answers to his or her prayers, to diligently review their past lives, in connection with their conduct both toward God and toward their fellow-men; earnestly begging the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance any thing which is grievous in His sight. When He does so, *it is not sufficient* to repent and merely confess the sin unto God! but where that sin has been against a fellow-creature, it must be confessed to him or to her (Matt. 5:23, 24; James 5:16), and everything in my power must be done to right the wrong, and make full restitution (Luke 19:8).

Alas that there is so very little teaching along this line today. Alas that so many of God's dear children have rather been instructed to puzzle their brains over whether the parable of the ten virgins treats of "Christendom" or the Jews in the "Tribulation period," or whether the battle of "Armageddon" is to be fought in a valley or on a mountain—occupation with such questions in *these* days makes us think of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning! It is the *practical* side of Christianity, that which pertains to our *present* welfare, both spiritually and temporally which need to be chiefly pondered. But these popular teachers cannot give out what they do not have in their own hearts; and the daily lives of most of them make it only too evident that they are strangers to an experimental and practical knowledge of God in their souls. Give such men a wide berth, my reader, for neither their lectures nor their writings can do you any real good.

Not long ago the editor was speaking on this subject, and the Lord revealed to him that the message was specially designed for one Sister who was present about whose life he knew nothing what ever. After the meeting she requested a private interview, and confessed to him a terrible sin (not immorality), which she had committed years ago, known to no human being. To right that wrong meant deep humiliation and self-abasement before cherished friends. She told us she had been praying long and earnestly for the salvation of her husband. We told her that until that sin in her past life was put right, she might as well pray to the stove, as to an holy God. She slept little that night, fighting her battle alone before God. Grace gave her the victory. The next morning she assured us that she was fully willing to do all in her power to right the wrong, no matter what the cost to her. And now for the sequel.

When the above-mentioned Sister arrived home, some days later, God had unmis-

takably and gloriously saved her husband. She found him on his knees! He now conducts their family worship. It is a new home! Much more might be added by way of amplification, but sufficient has been said for our present purpose. Reader, *what* is hindering *your* getting wondrous answers to prayer? What sin, what wrong is there in your past life, which needs be righted, not only before God but with your fellow-man? O allow the Devil no longer to cheat you out of God's best for this life. Prayerfully re-read the above and *act upon it*. A.W.P.