

Volume 16—Studies in the Scriptures—No. 11
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HONOURING THE SPIRIT.

It seems fitting that we should close this lengthy series of articles upon the Person, office, and operations of the Holy Spirit, by dwelling upon what is due Him from those in whom He has wrought so graciously, for it is very evident that some *recognition and response* must be made Him by us. There is, however, the more need for us to write something thereon, because our magazine goes to quite a number who belong to a company which refrains from all direct worship of the third Person in the Godhead, deeming it unscriptural and incongruous to do so. It seems strange that the very ones who claim to give the Spirit a freer and fuller place in their meetings than any branch of Christendom, should, at the same time, demur at prayer being immediately directed to Him. Yet it is so: some of them refuse to sing the Doxology because it ends with "Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

From time to time one and another of our readers have written, taking exception to occasional statements made by us, such as "what praise is due the Spirit for His grace and goodness unto us!" challenging us to point to any definite passage wherein we are bidden to worship or pray to the Spirit distinctively. First, let us point out that there are many things clearly *implied* in Scripture which are not formally and expressly stated, and to assert we must for that reason reject them is absurd—some have refused the canonicity of the book of Esther because the name of God is not found therein, yet His superintending Providence, His overruling power, His faithfulness and goodness, shine forth in each chapter! We build not our faith on any isolated texts, but on the Word of God as a whole, rightly and spiritually interpreted.

We have begun thus not because we are unable to find any definite statements in the Word which obviously warrant the position we have taken, but because we deemed it well to refute an erroneous principle. Even if there were no clear cases recorded of prayer and praise being offered immediately to the Holy Spirit, we should surely require some *strong positive proof* to show the Spirit is *not* to be supplicated. But where, we ask, is there anything in Holy Writ which informs us that one Person in the Godhead must be *excluded* from the praises that we make unto the Lord? Here we are meeting the objector on his own ground: if what we are about to advance fails to convince him, he must at least allow that he knows of no texts which refute or condemn us, no verse which warns us *against* rendering to the blessed Spirit that recognition and honour to which we consider He is fully entitled.

"Thou shalt fear ("worship"—Matt. 4:10) the LORD thy God, and serve Him" (Deut. 6:13). Now the Lord our God is a Unity in Trinity, that is, He subsists in three Persons who are co-essential and co-glorious. Therefore the Holy Spirit, equally with the Father and the Son, is entitled to and must receive devout homage, for we are here commanded to render the same to Him. This is confirmed by the "holy, holy, holy," of Isaiah 6:3, where we find the seraphim owning separately and worshipping distinctively the Eternal Three. The words that follow in verse 8, "Who will go for *Us*?" make it quite clear that the threefold "holy" was ascribed to the Blessed Trinity. Still further confirmation is found in Acts 28:25, 26, where the Apostle prefaces his quotation of Isaiah 6:9 with "well spake *the Holy Spirit* by Isaiah the Prophet." If, then, the angels ascribe glory and render worship to the Holy Spirit, shall we, who have been regenerated by Him, do less!?

“O come, let us *worship* and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Psa. 95:6). *Who is our “Maker?”* Perhaps you answer, Christ, the eternal Word, of whom it is said, “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3 and cf. Col. 1:16). That is true, yet Christ is not our “Maker” (either naturally or spiritually) *to the exclusion* of the Holy Spirit. The third Person of the Godhead, equally with the Father and the Son, is our “Maker.” In proof of this assertion we quote, “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the Breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4). Let the reader carefully compare Job 26:13 with Psalm 33:6. Let it also be duly noted that this 95th Psalm (vv. 7-11) is quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11 and prefaced with “Wherefore as the Holy Spirit saith.” Thus not only *may* we worship the blessed Spirit, but here in Psalm 95:6 we are *commanded* to do so.

It does indeed seem strange that any professing Christian should raise any objection and question the propriety of worshipping the Spirit. Are we not to acknowledge our dependence upon and obligations unto the Holy Spirit? Surely! surely! He is as much the Object of faith as is the Father and the Son: He is so in His Being and perfections, His Deity and personality, His offices and operations. Moreover, there are particular acts of trust and confidence to be exercised on Him. As He is God, he is to be worshipped, and that cannot be done aright without faith. We are to trust Him for His help in prayer and the discharge of every duty! We are to exercise confidence that He will complete the good work which He has begun in us. Especially should ministers of the Word look to Him for His help in and blessing upon their labours.

“Then said He unto me, Prophecy unto the Wind (Breath), prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Ezek. 37:9). We sincerely trust that none of our readers will suppose that the Lord bade His servant to perform an *idolatrous* act by invoking the *literal* “wind.” No, a comparison of verses 9 and 10 with verse 14 shows plainly that it was *the Holy Spirit* Himself who was referred to—see John 3:8. Nor does this passage stand alone. In Song of Solomon 4:16 we find the Spouse praying to the Spirit for renewal and revival: “Awake, O north Wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” She expressed her desires metaphorically, but this is what she breathed after. It is the Spirit of life, then, we should always apply to for quickening, for the enlivening and exciting of His graces in us.—A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

119. *Christian Rulers*: 13:17.

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). It is quite clear from the balance of the verse that its opening words have reference to religious leaders, and not to civil rulers. Adolph Saphir, who was very far from being a “Nicolaitan” was right when he declared: “Verse 7 and 17 show that there was a *stated ministry*, that there were recognised and regular teachers and pastors in the congregation, whose gifts not only, but whose *office* was acknowledged.” It is impossible that any unprejudiced and impartial mind should attentively consider the terms and implications of these verses and come to any other conclusion. The principle of subordination is absolutely essential to the well-being of any society that is to be rightly ordered and conducted—adumbrated even in the organization of our bodies.

In our text the Holy Spirit sets forth the third great duty which is required in our Christian profession, on account of the sacrifice of Christ and our sanctification by His blood. Most comprehensive and all-inclusive are the exhortations found in verses 15-17. The first respects our *spiritual* obligation, Godwards, rendering unto Him that which is His due (v. 15). The second respects our *social* obligation, rendering unto our needy fellows that which the requirements of charity dictate, according to our ability. The third has respect to our *ecclesiastical* obligation, rendering unto those officers in the church that submission and respect to which they are entitled by virtue of the position and authority which Christ has accorded them. This is a Gospel institution, which can only be disregarded to the manifest dishonour of the Lord and to our great loss.

Ever since the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, there have been wide differences of opinion among God's people concerning *the local church*: its constitution, its officers, and its discipline. Even where there was oneness of mind respecting the fundamentals of the Faith, godly men have differed considerably in their ecclesiastical views. Numbers of the most gifted of Christ's servants have, during the last three hundred years, written extensively upon the polity and policy of the local church, and though widely varying positions have been taken, and though each claimed to appeal to Scripture only for his authority, yet none succeeded in carrying the majority of professing Christians with him, or of persuading his opponents that *their* system was wrong.

While on the one hand we must admire the wisdom of Him who has *providentially ordered* as great a variety of types in the ecclesiastical sphere as He has in the physical and social—which though *not a rule* for us to walk by, *is* a subject for our admiration; yet on the other hand we cannot but deplore that they who are united on the same foundations and agreed in all the cardinal truths of Holy Writ, should lay such emphasis upon their circumstantial differences in sentiments as to prevent the exercise of mutual love and forbearance, and instead of labouring *in concert* within their respective departments to promote the common cause of Christ, should so often vex each other with needless disputes and uncharitable censures. Far better be silent altogether than contend for any portion of the Truth in a bitter, angry, censorious spirit.

No true Christian will hesitate to acknowledge that Christ Himself is the one infallible, authoritative Legislator and Governor of His Church, that He is the only Lord of conscience, and that nothing inconsistent with His revealed will should be practiced, and that

nothing He has definitely enjoined be omitted, by those professing allegiance to Him. But however generally acknowledged these principles are, we cannot get away from the fact that the misconstruction and misapplication of them have contributed more to divide the people of God and to alienate their affections one from the other, than any other cause that can be assigned. Surely those who are built upon the common foundation, who are led by the same Spirit, who are opposed by the same enemies, should love as brethren and bear each other's burdens. But alas! a mistaken zeal for Christ's honour has filled them with animosity against their fellow-disciples, split them into innumerable factions, and given rise to fierce and endless contentions.

We quite agree with the godly John Newton, when he said in his "Apologia," nearly two hundred years ago: "Men are born, educated, and called under a great variety of circumstances. Habits of life, local customs, early connections, and even bodily constitution, have more or less influence in forming their characters, and in giving a tincture and turn to their manner of thinking. So that though, in whatever is *essential* to their peace and holiness, they are all led by the same Spirit and mind the same things; in others of a *secondary* nature, their sentiments may, and often do differ, as much as the features of their faces. A uniformity of judgment among them is *not* to be expected while the wisest are defective in knowledge, the best are defiled with sin, and while the weaknesses of human nature which are common to them all, are so differently affected by a thousand impressions which are from their various situations. They *might*, however, maintain a unity of spirit, and live in the exercise of mutual love; were it not that every party, and almost every individual, unhappily conceives that they are bound in conscience to prescribe *their own* line of conduct as a standard to which all their brethren ought to conform. They are comparatively but few who consider this requisition to be as unnecessary, unreasonable, and impracticable, as it would be to insist or expect that every man's shoes should be exactly of one size.

"Thus, though all agree in asserting the authority and rights of the Lord Jesus as King and Head of His Church, the various apprehensions they frame of the rule to which He requires them to conform, and their pertinacious attachment to *their own* expositions of it, separate them almost as much from each other as if they were not united to Him by a principle of living faith. Their little differences form them into so many separate interests; and the heat with which they defend their own plans, and oppose all who cannot agree with them in a tittle, makes them forget that they are children in the same family, and servants of the same Master. And while they vex and worry each other with disputations and censures, the world wonders and laughs at them."

The position which has been taken by, perhaps, most of the leading writers, is something like this: Get away from the conflicting views of men, and *read the New Testament* prayerfully and impartially, and it will quickly be apparent that the Lord Jesus has not left such an important matter as the constitution of the churches undefined, but rather directed His Apostles to leave in their writings a pattern according to which it was His will all His churches in future ages were to be formed, and (according to the particular leanings of each respective writer) that it will be seen the primitive churches were "Congregational," "Baptists," "Presbyterian," or "Brethren Assemblies," and therefore any other system or scheme is unscriptural, and a presumptuous deviation from the declared will of the Lord.

If, however, the reader cares to take the time and trouble to consult *a number of the writers* in any one of these different schools, he will find that though they are all agreed

that a plain and satisfactory model of this "Congregational" church (or "Baptist," or "Presbyterian," or "Brethren Assembly," as the case may be) can easily be collected and stated from a perusal of the New Testament; yet when these same writers attempt to delineate and describe that church, they *differ considerably among themselves* as to the nature and number of its officers, powers and acts which are requisite to the constitution and administration of a Gospel church. There is very far from being that agreement *among themselves* which is certainly to be expected *if* the plan from which they profess to copy be so clearly and expressly revealed in the New Testament as to be binding upon believers in all ages.

It seems, then, that if every detail of the church's government and worship be exhibited in the Scriptures, either in the form of a precept or precedent, yet thus far God has not given sufficient skill to any one so as to enable him to collect and collate the various rules and regulations scattered throughout the Gospels, Acts, Epistle, and the Revelation, and arrange them into a systematic and orderly structure. But that none really takes this principle seriously appears from their own practices. There are a number of things reported of the primitive Christians which few if any companies of Christians today make any attempt to emulate. For example, the holding of all earthly possessions in common (Acts 2:44, 45), greeting one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor. 16:20), making provision for their widows when they reach the age of sixty (1 Tim. 5:9), or sending for the elders of the church to pray over and anoint us when we are sick (James 5:14)!

In reply to what has just been said, it will be pointed out that in the days of the Apostles the saints were endowed with *extraordinary* gifts, and consequently there were some things practiced by them (in Cor. 14, for example) which are *not* proper of our imitation today who have not those gifts. But that very admission *surrenders* the basic principle contended for. To be told that we should study the apostolic churches for *our model*, and then to be informed that some parts of their practice were *not* designed for our emulation, is too bewildering for the ordinary mind to grasp. Moreover, *God* has not told us anywhere *which* of the primitive practices were but transient and which were not. Where, then, is the man or men qualified to draw the line and declare authoritatively in *what respects* the state of the first Christians was hindered from being a pattern for us by the extraordinary dispensations of that generation, and in what cases their actions *are binding* on us now those extraordinary dispensations have ceased?

To the above it will at once be objected: But consider the only other alternative: surely it is most unreasonable to suppose that the Lord has left His people *without* a complete church model for their guidance! Is it not unthinkable that Christ would fail His people in such a vitally important matter as to how He would have them order all the concerns of the churches which bear His name, that He would leave them in ignorance of His will, as to their constitution, officers, order of worship, discipline, etc.? If God ordered Moses to make all things in the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him in the mount, and if that pattern was so complete that every board and nail in the house of worship was definitely defined, is it believable that He has made *less* provision for His people today, now that the fullness of time has come? This argument has indeed a most plausible sound to it, and thousands have been misled thereby; but a dispassionate examination of it shows it to be unwarrantable.

In the first place, there is no promise recorded in the New Testament that He *would* do so, and no statement through any Apostle that such a church model *has* been provided! In

the second place, the history of Christendom clearly indicates *the contrary*. Had such a model been given, it would be as clearly recognizable as the tabernacle pattern, and all who really desired to please the Lord would have responded thereto; and, in consequence, there had been *uniformity* among the true followers of Christ, instead of endless diversity and variety. But in the third place, this *proves too much*. If a Divine model has been given supplying all the details for the ordering of New Testament churches and their worship, as definite and as complete as was given for the tabernacle, then we would have minute regulations concerning the size, shape, and furnishings of the buildings in which we must worship, full directions for the ministers' apparel, and so on! The *absence* of those details is clear proof that no model for the churches comparable to the Divine pattern for the tabernacle has been vouchsafed us.

Then what conclusion are we forced to come to? This: a happy medium between the two alternatives suggested by most of those who have written on the subject. If on the one hand we cannot find in the New Testament that which in any wise corresponds to the "pattern" for the tabernacle (and the minute instructions God gave for the temple), on the other hand the Lord has not left us so completely in ignorance of His will that every man or company of Christians is left entirely to do that which is right in their own eyes. In keeping with the vastly different character of the two dispensations, the "liberty" of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) has supplanted the rigid legality of Judaism, and therefore has Christ supplied us with *general principles* (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:26, 40), which are sufficiently broad to allow of *varied* modification when applied to the differing circumstances of His people, situated in various climes and generations—in contrast from what was prescribed for the *single nation* of Israel of old.

In the New Testament we *are* furnished with a full revelation of all things necessary unto *salvation*, the knowledge whereof man by his own powers could never attain thereto; yet there is much *lacking there* on other matters which *was furnished* under the old covenant. God not only supplied Israel with the ceremonial law, which was to regulate all their church or religious life, but He also gave them a complete code of precepts for their *civil* government, and no one pretends He has done *this* for Christians! In the absence of that civil code, why should it be thought strange that God has left many minor ecclesiastical arrangements to the discretion of His servants? Unto those who are indignant at such a statement, and who are still ready to insist that the Lord has made known His will on *all* things respecting church and religious affairs, we would ask, Where does the New Testament prescribe what *marriage rites* should be used? Or the form of service for a funeral? But enough.

As Richard Hooker pertinently pointed out, "he who affirms speech to be necessary among all men throughout the world, doth not thereby import that all men must necessarily speak one kind of language. Even so the necessity of polity and regiment in all churches may be held, *without* holding any *one* certain form to be necessary in them all." This is far from granting that all the various modes of church government are *equally agreeable* to the spirit and genius of the Gospel, or equally suited to the promotion of edification. Once again we fully agree with John Newton when he said, "In essentials I agree with them all, and in circumstances I differ no more from any of the than they differ among themselves. They all confess they are fallible, yet they all decide with an air of infallibility; for they all in their turn expect me to unite with *them*, if I have any regard to the authority and honour of the Lord Jesus as the Head of the church. But the very con-

sideration they propose restrains me from uniting with any of them. For I cannot think that I should honour the headship and kingly office of Christ by acknowledging Him as the Head *of a party* and subdivision of His people to the exclusion of the rest.

“Every party uses fair sounding words of liberty; but when an explanation is made, it amounts to little more than this: that they will give me liberty to think as *they* think, and to act as *they* act; which to me, who claim the same right of thinking for myself and of acting according to the dictates of my own conscience, is no liberty at all. I therefore came to such conclusions as these: that I would love them all, that I would hold a friendly intercourse with them all, so far as they should providentially come in my way [and, he might have added, so far as they will allow me!]; but that I would stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made me free, and call none of them master; in fine, that if others sought to honour Him by laying a great stress on matters of doubtful disputation, my way of honouring Him should be by endeavouring to show that His kingdom is not of this world, nor consists in meats and drinks, in pleading for forms and parties, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; and that neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature, and the faith which worketh *by love*.”

This is the course which the writer has obviously sought to follow for the past ten years, both in connection with this magazine and in oral ministry. But alas! notwithstanding the boasted “broadmindedness” and “liberality” of this generation, we have found everywhere we have been the ecclesiastical barriers are as impregnable today as they were a century ago, and that no church, circle, or company of professing Christians is prepared to *really* welcome into their midst (no matter what his reputation or credentials) one who is unprepared to join and limit himself to *their* party, and pronounce all their shibboleths; and that the vast majority are unwilling to read any religious publication unless it bears upon it the label of their particular denomination. No wonder that the Spirit of God is quenched and His power and blessing absent, where such an un-Christlike, sectarian, bigoted and pharisaical spirit prevails.

We are not going to prescribe for others; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. But as far as the writer is concerned, he values his Christian liberty far too highly to voluntarily shut himself up in any ecclesiastical prison, where he is excluded from fellowship with his brethren and sisters scattered abroad. Of course since sinless perfection is not to be found in any individual on earth, it is not to be expected from any group of individuals. No one denomination or party has all the light. On the one hand, if the reader be a member of a church where unsound doctrine is preached or where no Scriptural discipline is maintained, his course is clear: Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 3:5. But if on the other hand, he belongs to any evangelical church which is honestly seeking to honour Christ and where his soul is being fed, then, in our humble judgment, he will be wise to remain there and “obey them that have the rule over him” yet let him *not* look down upon others who differ from him.

In dissenting from the popular view that the New Testament record of primitive Christianity furnishes a complete model of church government, and that the same is an authoritative rule binding upon the Lord’s people throughout the entire course of this dispensation, we are far from supposing that we shall carry with us the majority of our readers—by this time the writer ought to be sufficiently acquainted with human nature to prevent any such foolish day dreaming. And in affirming that the New Testament rather supplies us with general rules and principles, which are sufficiently elastic as to allow for *human*

discretion to be exercised in the application of them to particular instances of the church's outward conduct, we are quite prepared to face the charge that this statement is a "dangerous" one. Our reply is, that we are affirming no more than what is universally acknowledged concerning the regulation of the details of the life of *the individual believer*.

Is not the Christian daily made to cry unto God for wisdom how to act in his temporal affairs, and that because there are no specific precepts in the Word which prescribe for those particular exigencies? Is he not obliged, after prayerful deliberation, to *use his common sense* in applying the general rules of Scripture to a hundred minor details of his life? So common an occurrence is this and so universally does it obtain among the saints, that there is no need for us to enlarge upon it by illustrating the point—there is no need to *prove* what is self-evident. In view of this simple and obvious fact, why should we be the least surprised that God has ordained that His churches should follow a similar course, for what is a Gospel church but a company of individual believers in organized relationship? If, then, God has not told the individual believer at what hour he should rise on the Sabbath and how many meals he should eat that day, would he expect Him to state how long the minister's sermon is to be, or how many hymns or psalms are to be sung?

"The Lord Christ in the institution of Gospel churches—their state, order, rule, and worship—doth not require of His disciples that in their observance of His appointments they should *cease to be men*, or forego the use and exercise of their rational abilities, according to the rule of that exercise, which is *the light of nature*. Yea, because the rules and directions are in this case to be applied unto things spiritual and of mere revelation, He giveth wisdom and prudence to make that application in a due manner, unto those to whom the guidance and rule of the church is committed: wherefore, as unto all things which the light of nature directs us unto, with respect unto the observation of the duties prescribed by Christ in and unto the Church, we need no other institution but that of the use of the *especial spiritual understanding* which the Lord Christ gives us for that end.

"There are in the Scripture *general rules* directing us in the application of natural light, unto such a determination of all circumstances in the acts of church-rule and worship, as are sufficient for their performance decently and in order. Wherefore, as was said before, it is *utterly in vain* and useless to demand express institution of all the circumstances belonging unto the government, order, and worship of the church; or for the due improvement of things in themselves indifferent unto its edification, as occasion shall require. Nor are they capable to be any otherwise stated, but as they lie in the light of nature and spiritual prudence directed by general rules of Scripture" (John Owen).

Nor is this to discredit or disparage the Holy Scriptures. The Testimony of God is true, perfect, and all-sufficient *for the ends for which it was given*; but that Testimony is not honoured but dishonoured by us, if we extravagantly attribute to it that which God *never designed* for the same. Rome has erred grievously by declaring that the Scriptures are not sufficient, that "traditions" must be added if we are to have a full revelation of what is absolutely necessary for us to know in this life in order that we may be *saved* in the next. But some Protestants have gone to another extreme, taking the position that the Scriptures contain such a complete revelation of God's will for the regulation of our lives, both as individuals and as churches, that to act according to any other rule (be it the promptings of conscience or the dictates of reason) is presumptuous and sinful.

But to insist that the conduct of the church must have an express warrant from the New Testament *for every detail* of its procedure, and that to act otherwise is displeasing

to the Lord, is to go much further than that which obtained even under the Old Testament. What commandment from the Lord did the Gileadites have to erect that altar spoken of in Joshua 22:10? Did not congruity of reason—the fitness of things—induce them thereto and suffice for defense of their act? What Divine commandment had the women of Israel to yearly lament for Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:40)? What “thus saith the Lord” or scriptural precedent did Ezra have for making “a pulpit of wood” (Neh. 8:4), from which he preached to the people? What Divine commandment had the Jews to celebrate the feast of “Dedication” (John 10:22), nowhere spoken of in the Law, yet solemnized by Christ Himself?! To condemn all that is “of human invention” is not only to fly in the face of the judgment of many of the wisest and most godly men, but is to go beyond what the Scriptures themselves permit.—A. W. P.

The Life of David.

71. His Son's Death.

In last month's article we left Absalom caught in an oak, suspended in the air, unable to free himself. His predicament was indeed a desperate one, for all his followers had forsaken him. What was to be the sequel? David had given express instructions to his generals, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom" (2 Sam. 18:5). In that charge we see expressed the weakness of a doting father, rather than the uncompromising faithfulness of a monarch. It was not for the interests of his kingdom that such an insurrectionist should be spared, for none could tell how soon he would occasion further trouble. Sentiment ought never to override the requirements of righteousness, yet often it is far from easy to perform the latter when they come into conflict with the yearnings of the former. By yielding to his paternal feelings and giving such counsel to his men, David created a difficulty which should never have been raised.

"And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak" (2 Sam. 18:10). The commentators differ considerably in their estimations of what is recorded in this verse and those which immediately follow. Some criticise this man for his timidity in refusing to take matters into his own hands and rid the earth of such a wretch; others go to an opposite extreme and blame him as a sneak for revealing the situation to Joab, knowing that he would have no scruples against killing Absalom. Personally, we consider he did the right thing in taking the middle course. It was not for him, as a private person, to fly in the face of the king's charge, and act as public executioner; nor was it the thing for him to conceal from the general-in-charge the helpless position in which the arch-enemy of David was now placed: all of which illustrates what was said at the close of the preceding paragraph.

"And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? And I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle" (v. 11). Those words were evidently uttered rashly on the spur of the moment, for when Joab had listened to the man's reply, he did not further upbraid him. Joab failed to realize the quandary in which David's command had placed this man, or perhaps he was constitutionally incapable of appreciating the conscientious scruples which regulated others—which seems the more likely in the light of what follows. What a coarse and mercenary spirit his words betrayed! as though a monetary reward should have been sufficient inducement for any one to have slain Absalom in cold blood. One cannot expect such a gross materialist to value the finer sensibilities of others.

"And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me" (vv. 12, 13). This unnamed man was not to be intimidated by the fierce Joab, but boldly stood his ground and frankly avowed the principles which had regulated his conduct. Though it was not a lawful command which the king had imposed upon his subjects, yet this one respected the authority of his royal master. Moreover, as he shrewdly pointed out, what advantage would he receive from the largest reward if the penalty for his action were the forfeiting of his own life? That was an argument which admitted no

answer, acknowledged by Joab's abruptly terminating the conversation under the plea of haste.

"Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak" (v. 14). Joab will come before us again (D.V.) in the chapters to follow, but this seems as good a place as any to offer some remarks upon his character. It has been rightly said that "Among the followers and closest adherents of David, Joab was one. He was early found with David in the cave. Whilst Jonathan tarried in the court of Saul, Joab was sharing the hardships and dangers of David in the wilderness. Throughout all his subsequent dangers, he stood like a lion at his side, and if extent of outward service were regarded, David perhaps had no such servant as he. Yet in order to serve David aright, it was necessary to have respect not to his office merely, but also to appreciate the character of him who bore that office; to love him for *his own* as well as for his office sake, and above all, to remember that no real service could be rendered to David, except God were reverently regarded and reverently obeyed" (B.W. Newton).

It is possible for one to serve, because of the dignity of his office, one whose excellency as an individual we have no regard for. In such an event, our service, no matter however energetic, will probably have its springs in self-interest, and its course will be marked by self-will and pride. Such indeed was the case with Joab: he was zealous in maintaining the support of David's throne, yet he was ever alive to the maintenance of his own personal interests. He deemed it best that the crown should rest on David's brow, because by so doing his own fortunes were furthered. No matter how definitely or plaintively David might express his desires, Joab never hesitated, when the opportunity arose, to outrage the king's feelings or defy his will if he could thereby gain his own ends without at the same time compromising the stability of the throne. In such a course, Joab regarded neither David nor God.

No one can read carefully the sacred narrative without perceiving that in the latter years of his reign David was little more than a *nominal* king. He seems to have come thoroughly under the power of Joab, the captain of his armies; on the one hand he was too suspicious to trust him, and on the other too weak to dismiss him. It is both interesting and instructive to trace out *the occasion and cause* whereby Joab established such a despotic control over his royal master. Nor is this by any means a complicated task: "David wrote a letter *to Joab*, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (2 Sam. 11:14, 15). By making Joab the partner and secret agent of his guilty plot concerning Uriah, David sold himself into his hands: in that fatal letter he forfeited his liberty, surrendering it to this unscrupulous accomplice.

By temperament Joab was a daring and energetic man: a bold fighter in lawless times. The faction of Saul's house was so strong that at the beginning of his reign David could scarcely call the throne his own, or choose his servants according to his own pleasure. Joab was an able warrior, and though he sometimes avenged his own private quarrels at the expense of his sovereign's honour, thereby vexing him at heart, yet he was too strongly entrenched to be displaced. Nevertheless, at that time David was not afraid to open his mouth and rebuke him for the slaying of Abner. Nay, he openly asserted his authority by *compelling* Joab to rend his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn before this very Abner (2 Sam. 3:28-31)—a most humiliating experience for one of his proud heart,

and which made it unmistakably manifest that David was as yet supreme in his own dominions.

Circumstances might still constrain David to employ this renowned warrior, and he had not—short as had then been his reign—yielded himself up to this imperious subject. On the contrary, as his own cause waxed stronger and stronger, and the remnant of Saul's party dispersed, he became the king of Israel in fact as well as in name, so that his throne was established not only by law, but by public opinion too, for we are told that "whatsoever the king did, pleased all the people" (2 Sam. 3:36). Consequently, he was now in the condition to rule for himself, and this he did, for a little later we find him appointing this officer to be the commander of his army by his *own* decision, and that simply because Joab was the one who won that rank, when it was promised by David as the reward to any individual in his host who should be the first to get up to the gutter and smite the Jebusites at the storming of Zion (2 Sam. 5:8).

We have only to read carefully through the 8th and 10th chapters of 2 Samuel, in which are narrated the bold achievements of David at this bright period of his life, his prowess abroad and his strong policy at home, the energy he instilled into the national character, and the respect he commanded for it throughout all the surrounding countries, to perceive that he reigned without restraint and without a rival. But then came his fearful fall, that evil sowing from which he reaped so bitter a harvest. From that point onwards we may discern how Joab usurped by degrees an authority which he had not before. More and more he took matters into his own hands, executing or disregarding David's orders as suited his own designs; until finally, we shall see (D.V.) he dared to conspire against his very throne and the rightful successor of his line.

An incident recorded in 2 Samuel 14 well illustrates what we have pointed out above. There we see the hands of David tied, his efforts to free himself from his oppressor both feeble and ineffectual, and his punishment of Absalom successfully resisted, for it was Joab, through the widow of Tekoah, who clamoured for the recall of Absalom from his banishment. The suspicions of the king were aroused, for he asked "Is not the hand of *Joab* with thee in all this?" (14:19), nevertheless, he yielded to his will. It seems that this move on Joab's part was without any other design than to embarrass the king and force him to do that which could only lower him in the estimation of his subjects. Certainly he had no love for Absalom as the sequel clearly shows.

During Absalom's rebellion, Joab, as might have been expected, was loyal to the cause of David, for he had no desire to see *his* government overthrown and one of another order take its place. Joab knew full well what was in the heart of Absalom, and therefore he was prepared to resist him with all his might. He wished to have the present government of Israel continued, and that in David's own person, yet it was out of no love to David that he now fought against Absalom. This is evident from his open defiance of the express charge which the king had given his generals: "Deal gently for my sake with Absalom." But Joab heeded not, for he had lost all respect for David's commands. Nothing could be more deliberate than his infraction of this one—probably the most imperious which had ever been laid upon him. It was not in the fury of the fight that he forgot his commission of mercy, but in cold blood he deliberately went to the place where Absalom was hanging helpless and slew him.

No, if Joab had loved David and regarded him as his friend, he had never recklessly despised the anguish of David's heart and made him cry, "Would God I had died for thee,

O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33). Whatever may be said about his conferring a public benefit by the removal of this reprobate ringleader, the fact remains that Joab no longer cared anything for a king *whose guilty secret he shared*. He thrust Absalom through the heart with his three darts, and then made his way, with countenance unabashed, into the chamber of his royal master, where David was lamenting the death of his son. As we shall see, the sequel is a piece with what preceded: Joab imperious and heartless; David, once so regnant, abject in spirit and tame to the lash. How had the mighty fallen! Into what public humiliation as well as personal sorrows had his deed of lust and blood now sunk him down!

“And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent” (2 Sam. 18:17). What an ending is this! hanged in a tree, abandoned by his followers, dispatched by Joab, and now his body treated with the utmost contempt. Instead of receiving the honourable burial of a king’s son, he was ignominiously dealt with as a criminal; the casting of him into a great pit intimated their valuation of his carcass, while their laying upon him a great heap of stones signified that he ought to have been stoned to death as a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18, 21).

“Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king’s dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom’s place” (2 Sam. 18:18). What a striking and solemn contrast do these two verses present, and what a forcible illustration do they supply of that principle “whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased” (Luke 14:11): so it was in the history of Haman and of Nebuchadnezzar, and such was the case here. Absalom had three sons (2 Sam. 14:27), but they had predeceased their father, and therefore he sought to perpetuate his memory by setting up this pillar to honour his name, by the side of which he doubtless intended that his body should be interred. Alas, how vain are some men to attract the notice of future generations, who are at no pains to seek the approbation of God. But even in death Absalom was thwarted: “a great heap of stones” as a monument to his villainy was all that marked his resting-place.

“Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies” (2 Sam. 18:19). Ahimaaz was the son of Zadok the priest (2 Sam. 15:27), who was deeply devoted to David. He was one of the two men who had endangered their lives in the king’s service by bringing him tidings of Absalom’s plans (17:17-21). That he was a godly soul is intimated by the language which he used on this occasion, for instead of flattering Joab by congratulating him for his bringing the conflict to a triumphant issue, he ascribes the success to the Lord. How often God is forgotten in the flush of victory, and instead of exclaiming “*His* right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory” (Psa. 98:1), proud man attributes the defeating of his enemies to his own strength, vigilance or skill. In such an hour it is for the servant of God to lift up his voice and make known the truth that the glory belongs to God alone.

“And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king’s son is dead” (2 Sam. 18:20). In the light of what follows it is not easy to determine what it was that influenced Joab to refuse the request of Ahimaaz, for immediately afterward he bids another man go and tell the king what he had seen, and when Ahimaaz renewed his request,

after a slight demur Joab granted it. It is possible that Joab feared for the life of Ahimaaz and considered he was too valuable a man to be thrown away, for the name of the selected messenger ("Cushi") suggested that he was an Ethiopian—probably an African slave. Joab knew David was an impulsive and quick-tempered man, and remembered the fate which overtook the one who had bore to him the tidings of Saul's death (2 Sam. 1:15), and therefore he probably thought that a similar vengeance might be visited upon the one who should inform him of Absalom's death.

"Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushi. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?" (2 Sam. 18:22). The marginal renderings of this verse seem to decidedly confirm what we have just said above. The words of Ahimaaz "But howsoever" are literally "be what may": whatever be the risk of incurring the king's fury, I am quite willing to face it. Joab's "Wherefore wilt thou, *my son*," indicates that he held Ahimaaz in some esteem, and his "thou hast no tidings ready" is really "no tidings *convenient*," which intimates he sought to discourage him from being the bearer of news which would be so unwelcome to David. And why, it may be asked, was Ahimaaz anxious to serve as messenger on this fateful occasion? We believe it was because he was so devoted to the king that he wished, so far as was possible, to tactfully *lighten the blow*. This he did, for instead of bluntly blurting out that Absalom had been slain he simply said, "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king" (v. 28).—A. W. P.

The Divine Covenants.

6. *The Davidic.*

We recently saw an article which was headed "Humility and the Second Advent," but after reading through the same, we laid it down with a felling of disappointment. We had hoped from its title that the writer of it (quite unknown to us) would emphasize the deep need for lowliness of heart when taking up the prophetic Scriptures. God's holy Word ought ever to be approached with great reverence and sobriety, but particularly is this the case with Prophecy, for on no other subject (except it be the vexed question of church government) have God's servants differed more widely than in their views of things to come. It seems as though God had put not a little into His Word for the express purpose of staining human pride. Certainly, dogmatism ill becomes any of us where so many have erred.

We dare not say it is in a spirit of true humility that *we* now take up our pen, for the heart is very deceitful, and it generally follows that when we deem ourselves most humble, pride is at work in its subtlest form. It *is* however, with considerable diffidence that we continue these articles on the Davidic Covenant, for it presents to the writer the most difficult aspect of the whole subject. Possibly this is because of his early training, for it is never an easy matter to get quite away from our first thoughts and impressions on a subject. During the years of our spiritual infancy we heard and read nothing but the "Pre-millennial" interpretation of prophecy, and of course (as a spiritual child), we readily accepted all that our teachers said. But for the last decade, we have sought to carefully examine what was taught us, and we have discovered that, some of it at least, was but "fairy tales."

Common fairness compelled us to weigh the "Post-millennial" view. In doing so, we recognized a very real danger of allowing our mind to run to an opposite extreme. We are free to admit that upon a number of important points, this system of prophetic interpretation is no more satisfying to us than the "Pre," and, therefore, at the present time we are not prepared to commit ourselves to the entire position of either the one or the other; nor does that which is know as "A-millennial" completely solve the problem. In other words, we now have no definite ideas concerning events, applying to ourselves those words of the Lord, "It is *not* for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts 1:7). But this makes it the more difficult to write on our subject, and we can do so only according to that measure of light which God has vouchsafed us, urging our readers to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

We seem to be fully warranted in saying that what serves to divide interpreters of prophecy more than anything else is, whether its language is to be taken literally or figuratively. This, of course, opens a wide and most important field of study, into which we must not now enter. Yet we cannot forbear from pointing out that—it certainly seems to the writer—we have a most solemn warning in the Papist perversion of the Lord's supper, of the real danger there is of wresting the Scriptures at the very time we appear to honour them (by "childlike" faith and simplicity) in taking them at their face value. If Rome's insistence that "this is My body" means just what it says shows us what serious results follow when mistaking the emblem for the reality which it *represents*, ought not this to serve as a very real check against the gross carnalizing of Chilaism which literalizes what is spiritual and makes earthly what is heavenly?

The above remarks have been prompted by the promises contained in the Davidic Covenant, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:11-16. In view of all that has been before us in connection with the preceding covenants, it is but reasonable to expect that this one too has *both* a "letter" and a "spirit" significance. This expectation is, we believe, capable of clear demonstration: in their primary and inferior aspects those promises respected Solomon and his immediate successors, but in their ultimate and higher meaning they looked forward to Christ and His kingdom. In the account which David gave to the princes of Israel of the Divine communications he had received concerning the throne, he affirmed that God said unto him, "Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts: for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his father" (1 Chron. 28:6). Yet the application of the same words to Christ Himself—"I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son" (Heb. 1:5)—leave us in no doubt as to their deeper spiritual import.

The thrice occurrence of "for ever" in 2 Samuel 7:13, 16 *obliges* us to look beyond the natural posterity of David for the *ultimate* accomplishment of those promises. God did indeed set the carnal seed of David upon the throne of Israel and establish his kingdom, though certainly not unto all generations. Those who have contended that this covenant of royalty guaranteed to David the occupancy of his throne by one of his own descendants until the coming of the Messiah take a position which is impossible to defend—the facts of history flatly contradict them. David transmitted the kingdom of Israel to Solomon, and he in turn to Rehoboam, but *there* the reign of the family of David over all Israel actually (and so far as the writer perceives, *forever*) ceased. Let us enlarge upon this a little.

Rehoboam, by the haughtiness of his bearing and the cruelty of his measures, forfeited the attachment of his subjects. Ten of the tribes revolted unto Jeroboam, being completely dissevered from their brethren, and were never after recovered to their government. Thus, the reign of David's family *over all Israel* lasted, from beginning to end, at most but three generations, or about a century. Over Judah alone, his descendants continued to reign for several centuries more, until, at length Nebuchadnezzar invaded and conquered the nation, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, carried the people into captivity, and desolated the whole land. With this overthrow, which occurred some six centuries before the birth of Christ, *ended* the reign of David even over the tribe of Judah. His literal throne exists no more!

It is true after the Babylonian captivity, which continued seventy years, a remnant of the people returned, and for another century Judah was ruled by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. The first of these was of the house of David, but both the others belonged to the tribe of *Levi*! None of them, however, were *kings* in any sense, but merely governed under foreign authority. During the next two centuries Judah was governed by their high priests, all of whom pertained to the house of Aaron! Meanwhile, the nation was tributary successively to the Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Syrians. From the close of this period, until Judah became a Roman province under Herod, when Christ was born, the Jews were under the government of the Asmonian family, known as the Maccabees, all of whom belonged to the priestly tribe. History, then, manifestly refutes that interpretation of the Davidic Covenant which asserts that it promised David that his natural seed should reign upon his literal throne until Christ appeared. We are therefore forced to seek another interpretation.

Before considering the spiritual and higher import of the Divine promises in the Davidic Covenant, further attention must be given to their application unto David's *natural*

descendants, and particularly in connection with their *failures*; and here we cannot do better than quote from P. Fairbairn. "On that prophecy (2 Sam. 7:5-17), as on a sure foundation, a whole series of predictions began to be announced, in which the eye of faith was pointed to the bright visions in prospect, and, in particular, to that Child of promise, in whom the succession from David's loins was to terminate, and who was to reign forever over the heritage of God. But while the appointment itself was absolute, and the original prophecy was so far of the same character, that it indicated no suspension in the sovereignty of David's house, or actual break in the succession to his throne, David himself knew perfectly that there was an implied condition, which might render such a thing possible, and that the prophecy behooved to be read in the light of those great principles which pervade the whole of the Divine economy.

"Hence, in addition to all he had penned in his Psalms, he gave forth in his dying testimony, for the special benefit of his seed, a description of the ruler, such as the Word of promise contemplated, and such as ought to have been, at least, generally realized in those who occupied the throne of his kingdom: 'he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God' (2 Sam. 23:3). Not only so, but in his last and still more specific charge, delivered to his immediate successor on the throne, he expressly rested his expectation of the fulfillment of the covenant made with him, on the faithful adherence of those who should follow him to the law and testimony of God. For after enjoining Solomon to walk in the ways and keep the statutes of God, he adds as a reason for persuading to such a course, 'that the LORD may continue His word which He spake concerning me, saying, *If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel*' (1 Kings 2:40).

"But when this fundamental condition was violated, as it began to be in the time of Solomon himself, the prophetic word became, in a manner, responsive to the change; so that now it spoke almost in the same language respecting the house of David, which had formerly been addressed to that of Saul—'I will rend the kingdom from thee, and give it to thy servant': 1 Kings 11:11 compared with 1 Samuel 15:28; coupled only with the reservation that so much was still to be left to the house of David as was needed for maintaining the essential provisions of the covenant. Even this, however, appeared for a time to give way; the inveterate folly and wickedness of the royal line called for such visitations of judgment that the stately and glorious house of David, as it appears in the original prophecy, came afterwards to look like a frail tabernacle, and even this at a still future stage, has fallen prostrate to the ground—according to the figure in Amos 9:11.

"In consequence of these changes, darkness settled down on the heart of God's people, and fearful misgivings arose in their minds concerning the faithfulness of God to His covenant engagements. The painful question was stirred in their bosoms, 'Has His promise failed for evermore?' The thought even escaped from their lips, 'He has made void the covenant of His servant.' The whole Psalm from which these words are taken (the 89th), is a striking record of the manner in which *faith had to struggle* with such doubts and perplexities, when the house of David was (for a time) cast down from its excellency, and God's plighted word, like the ark of His covenant, seemed to be given up into the hands of His enemies.

"God, however, vindicated in due time the truthfulness of His word, and the certainty of the result which it contemplated. The prophecy *stood fast* as regarded the grand article

of its provisions—only in travelling on to its accomplishment, it had to pass through apparent defections and protracted delays, which could scarcely have been anticipated from the terms of its original announcement, and which were, in a sense, forced on it by human unbelief and waywardness. And so, within certain definite limits—those, namely, which connected the Divine promise with the sphere of man's responsibility, and bore on the time and mode of its fulfillment—it might justly be said to carry a *conditional* element in its bosom, in respect to those whom it more immediately concerned; while still, from first to last, the great purpose which it enshrined, *varied not* and continued to be, as a determinate counsel of Heaven, without shadow of turning.”

We must not here anticipate too much what we hope to yet take up in detail, but in bringing this article to a close it is pertinent to point out that, in view of what was before us in last month's article—on the terms of Messianic prophecy being cast, more or less, in the mold of the typical history of Israel—we surely should not repeat the mistake of the carnal Jews, who expected Christ to sit on an earthly throne. When the Old Testament prediction announced that the Messiah was to occupy the throne and kingdom of David, was it not intimated that He was *to rule over God's heritage*, and accomplish spiritually and perfectly, what His prototype did but temporally and partially, namely, bring deliverance, security and everlasting blessing to the people of God? In view of *the Divine personality* of the Messianic King and the world-wide extent of His Kingdom, all of necessity rises to a *higher* plane—Immanuel's reign must be of another order than that of the son of Jesse—spiritual, heavenly, eternal.

It should be quite obvious to those who are really acquainted with the earlier Scriptures that, in keeping with the character and times of the old covenant, any representation then made of Christ's throne and kingdom would, in the main at least, be of a *figurative and symbolic nature*, exhibited under the veil of the typical images supplied by Israel's commonwealth and history. It was *thus* that all the “better” things of the new covenant were shadowed forth. The immeasurable superiority of Christ's *Person* over all who were His types, compels us to look for a far grander and nobler discharge of His *offices* than which pertained unto them. It is true there is a *resemblance* between Christ as Prophet and Moses (Deut. 18:18), nevertheless the *contrast* is far more evident (Heb. 3:3, 5). It is true that there is an agreement between Christ as Priest and Melchizedek and Aaron (Heb. 5:1-5; 7:21), nevertheless the Antitype far excels them (Rev. 5:6, etc.). So the throne He sits on and the kingdom He administers is infinitely *higher* than that David or Solomon ever occupied (Heb. 2:9; 1:3). Beware of degrading the Divine King to the level of human ones!

The Lord of Glory no more stood (or stands) in need of any outward enthronement or local seat of government on earth in order to prove His title to David's kingdom, than He required any *physical* “anointing” to constitute Him Priest forever, or a material altar for the due presentation of His sacrifice to God. As another has well said, “Being the Son of the living God, and as such, Heir of all things, He possessed from the first all the powers of the kingdom, and proved that He possessed them by every word He uttered, every work of deliverance He performed, every judgment He pronounced, every act of mercy and forgiveness He dispensed, and the resistless control He wielded over the elements of nature and the realms of the dead. *These* were the signs of royalty He bore about with Him upon earth; and wonderful though they were, eclipsing in real grandeur all the glory of David and Solomon, they were still but the earlier preludes of that peerless majesty

which David described from afar when he saw Him, as the Lord, seated in royal state at His Father's right hand."—A.W.P.

The Believer's Paradox.

"Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). This was the honest confession of one whose faith had been put to a most severe test. It issued from a man who had a son possessed by a demon, which grievously tormented him: "wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away" (v. 18). What a sore trial was that for a tender parent! How thankful you should be, my reader, if in the sovereignty of God *you* are blest with normal and healthy children; and how sympathetic we should be toward those who have afflicted ones! No doubt this man had consulted different physicians, and perhaps had conferred with his pastor; but no relief had been obtained. What a testing of his submission to the will of God! Then he sought aid from Christ's disciples, but they had been unable to effect any cure, and "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." Such, in brief, is the background of our text.

And now the great Physician commanded that the tormented one should be brought to Him, but we read "And when he saw Him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming" (v. 20). Yes, matters generally seem to *get worse* with us when the Lord begins to take us in hand—to demonstrate that our extremity is God's opportunity to manifest His sufficiency. It was thus with the afflicted Hebrews in Egypt. The darkest hour precedes the dawn. But what a tremendous testing of this man's faith to behold his poor son foaming in agony at the Saviour's feet! "And He asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but *if* Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (vv. 21, 22). Did the Lord Jesus indignantly rebuke him for questioning His power, and turn away in disgust? No, for "great is His mercy." Instead, He answered, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (v. 23), and we are told "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

"Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." How paradoxical was this language, for it was almost, if not quite, a contradiction in terms. If this man was a genuine believer, then why should he bemoan his unbelief? Or, since he bemoaned his unbelief, with what propriety could he claim to be a believer? It is like a man saying, I am hot, help thou my shivering coldness; I am strong, help my tottering weakness; for faith and unbelief are *opposites*. Ah there are many paradoxes in the Christian life, which are quite unintelligible to the wise of this world. That man has to become a fool in order to be wise (1 Cor. 3:18), that he has to become a pauper in order to be made rich (Matt. 5:3), that he has to be made weak in order to become strong (2 Cor. 12:10), are enigmas that proud philosophers cannot elucidate. But thank God, what remains mysterious to the wise and prudent among men, is revealed to those who are babes in His family.

Unbelief is part of *the entail of the Fall*. By nature all of us are "children in whom is *no* faith" (Deut. 32:20). Frightful thing is that! To have a heart which distrusts God; to have a heart which is ever prone to lean upon anyone and anything rather than upon the Lord Himself; to forsake the Fountain, and betake ourselves to "cisterns which hold no water." Such is fallen man. Plenty of faith in himself, faith in his fellows, till he be disillusioned and disappointed; but no faith *in God*. That it is which explains why Christ is "despised an rejected of men," so that in the days of His flesh He cried "O *faithless* and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?" (Matt. 17:17). This it is which accounts for the universal attitude of men toward both the Law and the Gospel: they believe

not the Author and Giver of them, they are destitute of faith in Him; and thus they will continue all their days unless the Holy Spirit sovereignly intervenes and performs a miracle of grace in their hearts.

Unbelief *remains* in the hearts even of the regenerate. Though God imparts to them the gift of faith, he removes not (in this life) the root of unbelief. The Heroes of Faith, whose portraits hang upon the walls of fame in Hebrews 11, experienced that solemn fact. Look at Abraham, the father of all them that believe: when famine arose in Canaan he went down to Egypt for succour, and so afraid was he to trust his wife in the hands of God, he told a half-lie by saying she was his sister. Look at Moses; afraid to return to Egypt and confront Pharaoh after Jehovah had appeared to him at the burning bush and had promised the deliverance of His people (Exo. 3); and later, complaining to Him because he had so evilly dealt with Israel (Exo. 5:22, 23). Look at David, the slayer of Goliath, yet saying in his heart "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1). Look at the once intrepid Elijah, fleeing in terror from Jezebel. Ah, my reader, the Holy Spirit has delineated the characters of the saints in the colours of truth and reality; not as they ought to have been, but as they actually were.

Unbelief is *the great burden* of the saint. It grieves his soul: the man in our text *wept* over it—do you? Feign would the Christian be freed from this incubus, but the Lord does not see fit to remove it in this life. Frequently it acts like a cloud that covers the sun, for there is nothing so effectual as unbelief in hiding from us the light of God's countenance. It fetters our spiritual movements and impedes our progress. There are times when the believer fears that his unbelief will utterly sink him. Yet painful though this experience be, it is nevertheless a most hopeful and encouraging sign. It is not until God has communicated faith that any soul is *conscious of* its unbelief!—a living faith is necessary in order to recognize our dead unbelief. There must be Divine light to see its existence and Divine light to feel its power. Here, then, is solid comfort for those who are groaning over this burden: in your *unregenerate* days you were never *exercised over* your unbelief!

To genuinely mourn for our wicked unbelief is a sure evidence that Divine life is present in the soul. Those who are strangers to God certainly do not make conscience of such matters—how can they when they are quite unconscious of the plague of their hearts! But the Christian is not only conscious of unbelief, he goes to God and makes humble and contrite *confession* of the same. Yes, it is a sense of this grievous burden which drives him to the great Physician, crying, "Lord, I believe; *help Thou* mine unbelief." A true Christian does not cloak or excuse his unbelief, but honestly acknowledges it before God. Nor does he sit still and pity himself as one who is totally impotent and without any responsibility in the matter. No, he genuinely seeks "help," which clearly denotes he is *resisting* this enemy, but needs Divine assistance. True, without Christ he can do nothing (John 15:5), but he *can* do all things by Christ strengthening him (Phil. 4:13).

Here, then, is the solution to the difficulty and the explanation of the paradox presented by the language in our text. There are two distinct and totally different principles or "natures" indwelling the saint: faith and unbelief, and there is a continual opposition between them. They issue from the "spirit" and the "flesh," concerning which we read, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things which ye would" (Gal. 5:17). It is this unceasing warfare between the two antagonistic principles that give rise to a *dual experi-*

ence: one moment trusting God, the next doubting Him; one moment resting upon and drawing comfort from His promises, the next having no confidence in the same. And this dual and distressing experience moves him to cry “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” Ah, my reader, if *you* are not plagued with and burdened by unbelief, if you do not humbly confess the same to God and seek His help about it, then are you of all men most miserable.

Contrariwise, as we have already said, here is that which provides real comfort for the conscience-distressed and Satan-harassed soul. How often the Devil will tell a Christian, “Your profession is an empty one: you do not belong to the Household of Faith—how can you, when filled with unbelief!?” Listen, dear friend: the man in our text was a genuine believer, yet he owned *his* unbelief; and that is *recorded* for our instruction and comfort. This is one of the plainest possible proofs that we *are* believers. No unbeliever ever shed tears over his unbelief; no empty professor ever groaned because of his questioning of God; no hypocrite is burdened by his doubts and fears. No; such are filled with carnal confidence and fleshly assurance: *they* have not had a doubt about their salvation for years past; they can exercise faith any time, as easily as you can turn a tap and make the water come; but such is not the faith of God's elect.

“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” There are four things here claiming our attention. First, the Paradox presented: this, together with its solution, we have considered above. Second, a Fact affirmed: “Lord, I believe.” Third, a Request preferred: “help Thou.” Fourth, a Confession made: “mine unbelief.” As it is often helpful to depart from the verbal arrangement of a text, we will do so here, and take up its several clauses in their inverse order, looking at this man's confession, then his petition for help, and then the plea by which he supported his request: “I believe.”

The Confession made: “mine unbelief.” We will, very briefly, observe four things in connection with the same. First, it was an *honest* confession. This is the first thing that God requires from any praying soul: sincerity, genuineness, reality. He is not to be imposed upon by cant, nor will the mere uttering of words, however scriptural, gain His ear. Then be frank and artless in all your dealings with God, and never pretend to be what you are not: to the very end of your earthly pilgrimage, you will be (in yourself) a vile sinner, unworthy of the least of His mercies. This man did not claim to possess a faith that never wavered or boast that he was free from doubts and fears. No, he honestly *acknowledged* that the sum of his faith was frequently eclipsed by the dark clouds of unbelief. O to be delivered from all guile when approaching the Throne of Grace.

Second, his confession was an *humble* one. That is the next thing which God requires from the praying soul: that he strip himself of the rags of self-righteousness and come before Him as one who is sinful and needy. This is very evident from the Epistle to the Laodiceans: they refused to abase themselves and take their proper place before the Lord. His charge was, “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). Alas, to how many professing Christians do those solemn words apply today! To all such Christ says, “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (v. 18). It is just at this very point that the Christian is distinguished from the hypo-

crite: the former humbles himself and takes his place before God in the dust, acknowledging his wicked unbelief.

Third, his confession was a *feeling* one, and this is the next thing which God requires from each praying soul, for He desires “truth (reality) in the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6). It is not accurate and pious expressions, but a real sense of need in the soul which constitutes the essence of prayer. I might as well kneel down and worship gods of stone, as offer to the living God a prayer of words alone. That the confession of our text *was* a feeling one is evidenced by the fact that it was accompanied by *tears*. If the writer may be permitted to speak for his readers, Is it not at *this* point that we so often fail the worst, especially in the confessing of our sins. Alas, how little are our hearts affected by them: how mechanical and impenitent are the owning of our faults. Lord, melt our hard hearts.

Fourth, it was a *representative* confession, by which we mean it was suited to the case of all God's children. There will never come a time in this world when such language is unfitted even for those who are members of the Household of Faith. No matter how much God is graciously pleased to increase our faith, indwelling unbelief will still be present to struggle against it. It is just this element which renders the prayers of Scripture so pertinent to the saints of all ages: they exactly suit their case and express their sentiments. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Prov. 27:19).

Let us consider next *his Petition*, for there is much in the details of this incident which affords us valuable instruction on the subject of prayer: “*help*, Lord.” First, look again at the *occasion* of it. This was an overwhelming anxiety over his afflicted son, finding relief in unburdening his heart to the Lord. And that is what all real supplication is. There is far more genuine petitioning of God in seasons of adversity than during times of prosperity; and that is the reason why many a grief-wrung ejaculation, or an inarticulate groan reaches God's ear, when many a nicely worded and carnally-admired “prayer” never reaches any higher than the ceiling of the room. Read through Psalm 107 and observe the repeated “Then”! When there is a real sense of need, a burdened soul requires no external “helps” as to what to say and how to say it; a cry spontaneously emanates from the stricken soul and wings its way to Heaven.

But there was something more than the pitiful state of his son which prompted this petition: the father was conscious that his own unbelief was hindering the desired blessing (or why did he cry out for “help” against it), and *that* was unbearable. If you had to carry a basket containing some articles which weighed only a few ounces, you would never think of asking someone for a helping hand; but if you were staggering along with a load that weighed twenty or thirty pounds, you would beg assistance—unless you were too proud and independent to seek it. And so it is in heart matters: the more we make conscience of the thoughts and intents of the same, the more we are exercised over that which is disorderly and God-dishonouring, and the more we grow in grace, the more keenly we shall feel such irregularities.

Second, consider the *spirituality* of his plea. The more spiritual the soul becomes, the more spiritual are its petitions. It is a sure mark of spiritual immaturity when relief from bodily ailments are more valued by us than deliverance from moral maladies, or when material mercies are prized above an increase of our graces. This man did not cry out, “Lord, heal my son”—that had been *natural*; but “Lord, help mine unbelief”—that was truly *spiritual*. The fact is that many of the most spiritual prayers issue from those who regard themselves as being the least spiritual; yea, who seriously doubt if they have any

spirituality at all. Unspiritual souls never pray for help against unbelief. It is much to be thankful for when we are made painfully conscious of our unbelief, for thousands of church-members never are so; and it is a still greater cause for praise when we are honestly burdened thereby, and moved to pray for deliverance.

Third, its *meaning*. This man recognized that the Lord was the only one who could effectually aid him. Ah, it is a grand thing when we are brought to the point where we realize that none but God Himself can subdue the workings of this evil in us. All self-help is vain; all fellow-creatures are powerless to render any relief—they cannot relieve themselves, still less others. Then “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and He shall *sustain thee*” (Psa. 55:22). This man definitely applied to Christ. It is indeed a blessed thing when we are so oppressed by our unbelief that we betake ourselves to the great Physician: so many groan under it, but do no more; others hug it to themselves, and get no further. “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief”: put forth Thy gracious power and subdue this God-dishonouring spirit; enable me to strive against it; suffer me not to excuse it, or to pity myself for it and fatalistically yield to it; cause me to regard it as an evil to be hated, an enemy to be resisted, a sin to be confessed.

Fourth, mark its *comprehensiveness*. His petition was exceeding brief, yet it covered much ground. As faith is the root from which all good works proceed, so unbelief is the source of all evil. This is our master sin, “*the sin which doth so easily beset us*” (Heb. 12:1). Unbelief is the cause of all our troubles and failures. This is the strategic point where Satan concentrates his forces against us, and therefore it is *here* above all that we need Divine *help*. “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief”: Lord, I do expect Thee to undertake for me, yet I am not able to exclude all doubting; I am persuaded of Thy power and pity, but enable me to rely upon Thee more fully and constantly.

We turn now to *the Plea* which accompanied this prayer for help, for so we may legitimately regard these words, “Lord, I believe.” His cry for Divine assistance, accompanied by an humble confession, was made on this ground: because I believe, Lord, take pity upon me and subdue mine unbelief. To obtain the granting of our petition it must be backed up by some valid and suitable argument. Prayer is something more than presenting a request to God; it is *pleading with Him*, presenting some reason why He should grant that for which we ask. There are various pleas we may make; such as, because I am in deep need of the same, because Thou hast promised to supply it, because it will be for Thy glory to do so; for Christ’s sake. This is what the Lord means when He says, “Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob” (Isa. 41:21).

First, then, this plea was a *necessary* one, for God will not hear an unbeliever. “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” (Heb. 11:6). “Lord, I believe,” not as I would do, nor as I should do; yet I deny not Thy existence, I question not the verity of Thy Word, I am persuaded Thou canst not lie, I doubt not Thy power, Thy goodness, Thy mercy. I *believe*, though feebly, haltingly, spasmodically. I appeal to Thee, O Thou Searcher of hearts: Thou seest the little spark of fire beneath the smouldering flax, the flicker of faith behind the clouds of unbelief. Ah, is it not at this point we so often fail: when presenting our petitions we must *accompany them with suitable pleas*, for then God sees we are in earnest. Study carefully Christ’s prayer in John 17 and ob-

serve how each request is supported by a reason or plea—either before or after, in the words “that,” “for,” etc.

Second, it is an *instructive* plea. What valuable teaching is there here for those who desire to pray aright! In our ignorance and foolishness, *we* had probably concluded that such a prayer as this man made was unsuitable and unseemly—a contradiction in terms. It is recorded for our learning. One great lesson it inculcates is that we ought never to look on our graces without also viewing our infirmities; nor should we confess our sins without also owning the Spirit’s fruit in us. For example, if I am made sensible of my deep need of more humility, when asking God for the same, I should acknowledge my pride; contrariwise, when confessing my pride, I should thank God for humbling my heart to do so. If I am begging for more patience and submission, I must confess my self-will and fractiousness; yet also thank God for making me feel my need of the opposites.

Third, it was an *acceptable* plea. God is pleased when His people own their relationship to Him, pleading that they are His children, and acknowledging the Spirit’s work within. It is a false and reprehensible humility which refuses so to do. Observe the example of David: “O *my* God, I *trust* in Thee: let not mine enemies triumph over me” (Psa. 25:2); “In Thee, O LORD, *do I* put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness” (Psa. 31:1); “Preserve my soul; *for I am holy*: O Thou my God, save Thy servant that *trusteth* in Thee” (Psa. 86:2). Observe how Asaph pleaded with God the relationship which Israel sustained to Him: “Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old” (Psa. 74:2). This is the very ground taken by our great High Priest when interceding for His people: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; *for they are Thine*” (John 17:9). We, then, shall pray acceptably if we plead “Lord, I am Thine, undertake for me; I am a believer, subdue mine unbelief.”

Fourth, it was a *prevailing* plea. Of course it was: had not Christ said, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” This dear man’s petition gained the day: the Lord undertook for him, and his poor son was made whole. When we really believe, the battle is half, nay nine-tenths, won. It all turns upon that: it is the prayer of faith which gains the ear and moves the hand of God. Hence, when we read of Abraham that “he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20), *we* should cry “Lord, *I believe*; help Thou mine unbelief.” As we read, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it *shall* be given him” (James 1:5), *we* should cry “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,” for it is written, “but let him *ask in faith* nothing wavering.”

We may apply our text to those *seeking salvation*. There may be a reader of this article who is halting between two opinions. He is convinced that Christ alone can meet his needs and satisfy his soul, yet he finds it so hard to give up the world and abandon his idols. He knows full well that in Christ alone is eternal life to be found, yet Satan still has such a hold upon him that he cannot surrender to the Lord Jesus and forsake the pleasures of sin. Then come to Him and say, “Lord, I believe; *help Thou* mine unbelief.” Or, it may be, he feels himself to be such a godless wretch that he fears his case is hopeless: having sinned so grievously against light and privileges, he dares not venture upon the Gospel promises. Come to Christ and cry from the heart, “Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

Our text may be applied unto *God's providences*. The Christian can say "the LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa. 23:1), yet when circumstances seem to be all against him, he is unable to appropriate the blessed truth that God shall supply all his need (Phil. 4:19). Fearful that he shall come to abject destitution, he is unable to fully trust the Lord. Then come to Christ and say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Many a one can say I am sure that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28) means what it says, yet there are some things in his circumstances which he finds exceedingly difficult to believe will issue in real good for him. Instead of submitting to God's disposing will, he is often full of rebellion; instead of kissing the rod, he finds himself kicking against it. Then come to Christ and say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

Our text may be applied to *personal assurance*. How many a Satan-harassed believer is exclaiming, I greatly fear that I cannot be among the saved, for if I were, I surely would not sin as I do. In view of the raging of my lusts, the frequency of which they overcome my every effort to resist them, it would be presumptuous to affirm that the reigning power of sin was dethroned within *me*. My friend, David cried "iniquities prevail against me" (Psa. 65:3). But you say, My heart is such a sink of iniquity, I dare not claim to be regenerated; often I do not loathe sin, nor even desire to. Ah, but it is not always thus: are not such seasons followed by contrition and confession!? Yes, you say, but right after I fall again into the mire, sometimes deeper than before; ah, but do you *stay* there? Do you completely abandon the Throne of Grace? Does not a cry of distress go up from you to God? Then *continue* crying "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." May God add His blessing to this sermon for His name's sake.—A.W.P.

The Doctrine of Sanctification.

14. *Its Practice.*

Because they have been perfectly sanctified by Christ, and because they have been made saints by the Holy Spirit, believers are called upon to lead saintly lives, that is, to yield unto God the throne of their hearts and aim at His glory in all their conduct. Therein does the *practice* of sanctification actually consist. It is the fitting response which the Christian is required to make unto the amazing grace that has been shown him. Negatively, he is to avoid everything which is contrary to and inconsistent with his high calling in Christ. Positively, he is to seek after and cultivate whatever will manifest and adorn the same. God claims the entire being, and demands holiness in every thought, word, and act. The standard of personal holiness which He has set before us is one of flawless perfection, and at this we must constantly aim.

At the close of last month's article we pointed out how important it is that the Christian should watch against the abatement of his spiritual longings, and avoid whatever tends to dampen his love for God and dull his appetite for spiritual things. Let us now mention some of the things which bring deadness upon the soul and greatly hinder the practice of sanctification. First, the committing of sins which have not been duly *repented* of. Where sin is not fully repented of, it is *allowed* (condoned), and therein the Holy Spirit is resisted and grieved. Consequently, He withholds both His comforts and His grace, and the believer's strength is greatly reduced. God will not be trifled with, and when He is offended thus, He smites the heart with deadness and hardness, so that the spiritual life is much impaired and power for holy living is considerably reduced. Learn, then, to stand in awe not only of great, but smaller sins.

Second, *slackness in the performance of duties*, especially neglect of those means of grace whereby the Christian is kept healthy and fresh in living unto God. Slothfulness and carelessness more often steal in upon believers than positive outbursts and commission of sin. They are more insidious, less likely to be judged by them, and are frequent causes of deadness of heart. This sluggishness of soul is most reprehensible, for it is a despising of the means God has appointed for our good. To expect grace from God when we turn from the channels through which it flows, is to tempt Him or act presumptuously. To lie upon a bed of ease, and then say Christ must do it all, is a species of hypocrisy. When the Spouse sleeps, Christ withdraws (Song 5:6). Grace was never intended to incite to idleness. The fact that *God* works in us is the very reason why *we* must work (Phil. 2:12, 13).

Third, *ingratitude* or lack of thankfulness for those spiritual benefits we have already received. God requires to have His gifts acknowledged, therefore does He often stay His hand and suspend the influences of His grace where His bounty be not owned. "Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, *abounding therein with thanksgiving*" (Col. 2:7): the way to grow in faith is to be thankful for what *we have* received—and not, under a pretence of humility and modesty, deny that we have any! To bless God for the grace he has already bestowed is an effectual means of retaining it and of having more added to it. But if we are ungrateful and querulous, be not surprised if deadness and discouragement of heart come upon you.

Fourth, *fleshly indulgence* and flirting with the world is a great hindrance to the practice of holiness. Just so far as we gratify the flesh, we are straitened in the spirit, and to the extent that we seek comfort and satisfaction from the world, do we deprive ourselves

of the grace and joy there is to be found in Christ. An immoderate use of earthly things, an inordinate affection for human objects, an unequal yoke with unbelievers, brings deadness upon the soul. How much, then, we need to make that prayer our own: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way" (Psa. 119:37). The Spirit is grieved when we become addicted to vain pleasures, and therefore as sensuality increases the vitality of grace in us decays.

Other things injure the life of practical holiness, but we name only two more. *Pride* in spiritual attainments. When we take credit to ourselves for our growth in grace or victories over sin, the Spirit is grieved and His operations cease. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). He is jealous of His honour, and will not divide it with us. The garland we put upon our own heads soon withers, and those gifts we become puffed up with are quickly blasted. By humiliating falls God teaches us to ascribe all glory to Himself. *Heavy troubles*, temporal reverses, family bereavements, the loss of health dampen our spirits and retard the wheels of spiritual action. Therefore we find the Psalmist praying "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto Thy word" (Psa. 119:107).

Probably there are not a few of our readers ready to exclaim, In the last few sentences you have placed your finger closer to the seat of *my* trouble than in any of the previous points. It is the difficulty of the way, the trying nature of my circumstances, the unsuitable environment in which I am placed that really makes it impossible for me to live a saintly life and be a fruitful Christian. Ah, my friend, *that* is no valid excuse. The heavier be the pressure upon us, the more it should drive us to our knees. The deader we feel ourselves to be, the more earnest should we cry unto God for Him to quicken us. Was it not so in the case of the Psalmist? True, he was "afflicted very much," yet he did not give way to despondency and conclude his situation was beyond relief. No, he turned unto God and sought fresh supplies of grace.

"If one is placed in circumstances quite decent and honourable, yet not conducive to holiness, where does sanctification count in one's life?" This question was recently sent us by a reader who was much interrupted while writing us, and apologized for the wording. But the thought is quite intelligible: let us express it in a variety of forms. If one be placed in circumstances where there is nothing to encourage striving after a closer walk with God, how can he expect to thrive like those who are more congenially situated? If one be obliged to work day after day among a company of the godless, and even in the home meet with opposition and ridicule, will not the fruits of the Spirit be necessarily chilled? If one has so many domestic duties to perform that there is scarcely any time available for the cultivation of personal piety, and when at night she is too exhausted to read with profit, how can one expect to grow in grace?

Let us begin our answer to these very pertinent inquiries, by affirming that there are *no* "circumstances" which are uncongenial to the cultivation and exercise of personal holiness, no environment or situation in life which is unsuitable to a close walking with God. We quite understand what is in the mind of the above questioner, and fully appreciate the force of his difficulty; but he is failing to take into account several vitally important considerations, and it is his very failure in overlooking these considerations which will make him the more surprised at the answer we have given. Well can we imagine some saying, Ah, you would not be so quick to affirm that no circumstances are uncongenial to personal holiness if *you* had to live your life as and where I am compelled to live *mine*.

Bear with us for a few moments, dear friend, and seek to weigh impartially what we now write. Take first the *Divine* side of the matter. Is it not *God Himself* who regulates all our “circumstances”? Most certainly it is, for it is written “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are *all things*: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). Then it is *God*, and not blind fate, not a fickle “fortune” (or misfortune), who has placed you in the very situation which you now occupy! He is the One who planned from all eternity the very environment which you are now in: to believe otherwise is virtual atheism! Moreover, if you are His child, then He always has in view your highest and ultimate welfare: “For we know that all things work together *for good* to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28), and that “all things” includes your unpleasant “circumstances”!

Now let us turn to *the human* side of the matter, by which we mean the *response* which you ought to make to what has just been pointed out. Your first duty is to *exercise faith* in the above passages, and recognize God's shaping hand in your present lot. Your second duty is obviously to humbly submit and *be content* with what God has appointed, and not chafe and murmur at it, for that is nothing but a species of rebellion against the providential will of God. Not only will it not help you, but it is folly to envy those whom you suppose are more favourably situated for the cultivation of holiness: *every* situation has its own (relative) disadvantage and difficulties—you little know of the temptations which the “favourably situated” ones encounter!

Your third duty is to humbly but earnestly beg God to sanctify the “circumstances” *to you*. He is able to bring food out of evil, to make a real blessing what now seems to be a serious hindrance. Nothing is too hard for God to accomplish: He can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, He can make the desert to rejoice and the wilderness blossom as the rose; He can make the feeble mighty and bring the dead to life. Surely, then, He is well able to sanctify to your soul the most trying situation, the most unpropitious environment, and make fertile to you its sterile soil. The fact is, dear reader, that that very lot you find so hard to bear only provides a suitable opportunity for you to prove the sufficiency of God's grace.

Ah, *that* is the very essence of the matter. If you definitely and diligently seek grace from God and are then enabled to be submissive, trustful, humble, patient, unmurmuring, thankful that your lot is not far worse than it is, then you *are* bringing forth the fruits of holiness! Are we not told that “a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4)? Yes, valued by Him more highly than some of the showier gifts which others are permitted to exercise in the pulpit. All plants are not the same, nor do they all thrive equally well in the same kind of soil. Likewise, there is great variety in the graces of the Spirit, and *different environments* are needed for their cultivation and manifestation. Shall the fern complain because God placed it in a damp and shaded nook? Shall the water lily murmur because a pond rather than a garden be its dwelling place?

Alas, you say, how that *condemns* me! How sadly have I failed to see God's will appointing and His hand shaping my circumstances. I am almost, if not quite as blind, as the grossest skeptic. Of course I am quite familiar with the words “All things work together for good to them that love God,” but I have never applied them to the *unpleasant* details of my life. And oh! what complaining, impatience, unbelief, rebellion, I am guilty of! Truly I am like “a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jer. 31:18). I must admit how often I have envied those whose path appeared to be much smoother and easier than mine,

and it *does* seem to me that if I had more leisure or a stronger body, and close contact with those who are spiritually minded, I would make better progress.

As for the third duty you mentioned, I *have* begged God to sanctify trials to my heart, to give me strength to carry the cross, to make a blessing to me those things which I find most unpleasant. O how earnestly and frequently have I besought Him for grace to be meek and quiet, content and unmurmuring, patient and trustful. But alas, I cannot have His ear, for I often find the more I pray the more trying things become and the worse I am. I acknowledge that I am a complete failure and feel utterly discouraged. I know not what more to do, and can only cry out "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). Tell me, is there no remedy, no relief to be obtained, no way in which I can obtain deliverance from my sinful self?

It is just at this very point that the religious quacks of the day so often obtain a hearing, and persuade distressed Christians to give a trial to *their* remedy. Struggling against the power of indwelling sin, often tripped up by Satan, brought to seriously question their regeneration, at their wit's end to know what to do for relief, certain preachers will assure them that God has provided for just this contingency. Varying somewhat in their terms (according to the particular school they belong to), they will tell such an one whose experience we have described above that he or she has been "justified" but not yet "sanctified," and that if "the second blessing" be sought and obtained, a tremendous difference will follow. Or, the distressed one will be informed that what he needs is the "filling" or "baptism of the Spirit," or that "the higher life," or the victorious life" is what provides the grand panacea for all his ills.

Let us take the "second blessing" people first. This blessing is referred to by them as "entire sanctification," "perfect love," and "complete cleansing." They insist that it is a second work of grace wrought in the believer, as definite and distinct as what took place at his conversion. They teach that the first blessing bestows the *pardon* of sin, whereas the second removes the *root* of sin, purifying the heart from all corruption. They claim that those who enter into this second blessing may live a life which is without spot or blemish, wholly acceptable unto God. Its leaders affirm that they are entirely delivered from evil inclinations, all inward pollutions, that temptations only come to them now from without, and that the fiery darts of the Wicked One fall harmlessly against the shield of their faith. They are pure internally and victorious externally: filled with perfect love, peace and joy.

This second blessing is entered into by the seeking soul "laying his all upon the altar," unreservedly consecrating himself to God. He must believe without the slightest doubting that the Lord is able and willing to perform this work of grace in him and eradicate the sinful nature from his being. He is told that just as surely as the Lord sent down fire from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice which was placed upon the temple altar of old, so the Holy Spirit will now come as a flame of fire and burn up his evil propensities root and branch. He is informed that the secret of the whole thing lies in the exercise of childlike *faith*. Having placed his all upon the altar, he must be fully assured that God has accepted his sacrifice, and totally ignoring the evidence of his senses and feelings, he is to believe the great work is done, that he is now entirely sanctified, that sin has been eradicated from his being, and he must now thank God for it and testify to his fellows that the second blessing is *his*.

What shall we say of these things? First, that they are an utter delusion, a religious mirage which mocks the weary traveler across the desert of time. They promise that which is unfulfilled and unattainable in this life. Second, they cruelly raise hopes in the heart of distressed people, the dashing of which leaves them in a far worse state than they were before. These poor souls have implicit confidence in their teachers, and carry out their instructions to the letter, and when they find the result is not what they were told, they blame themselves—for their lack of faith, etc. In the course of our experience we have met with numbers who have honestly and earnestly sought this “second blessing” of “entire sanctification,” only to meet with disappointment and then sink into abject despair. Some of them (known to us personally) ended in the madhouse, while others committed suicide. Third, such teaching is directly contrary to the Word of God, and therefore is to shunned as a plague.

A few words now upon the “higher life” teaching. While not so extreme and pernicious as the former, it is nevertheless delusive and disappointing. There are various schools with different terms to describe *their* “blessings.” But that which is common to them all is this: God has provided something far better for His children in this life than that which merely accompanies conversion, something which if sought and received will lift them above the level occupied by so many Christians, which will deliver them from an up-and-down experience, from doubting and mourning, and make them overcoming believers. Though the “flesh” be not eradicated, they will now live constantly in the Spirit, though the sinful nature be not removed, they will have complete victory over it; though they are yet feeble and fallible creatures, the Spirit will so fill and energize them that they shall possess wondrous “power for service” and become successful “winners of souls for Christ.”

And how is this wondrous change brought about? What must one do who is keenly desirous of entering into this blissful experience? Various answers are returned. Some say we must wait upon God and continue in earnest prayer, pleading Christ’s promise, as the disciples did the ten days preceding Pentecost. Others say at conversion we simply accepted Christ as our Saviour, and that now we must surrender to Him as “absolute Lord and Master of your life, so that never again will you question His authority, or disobey His commands.” Still others tell us that the reason why we have failed so sadly hitherto is because we have attempted to resist the Devil and overcome sin in our strength, but that if we now receive Christ in His fullness, turn the battle completely over to Him, and trust Him moment by moment, we shall be more than conquerors.

What shall we say to these things? First, that they are entirely without Scriptural warrant. Where is there any record in Acts of the Apostles revisiting their converts and telling them of something far better than what became theirs at conversion? Where is there anything in the Epistles (some of which were addressed to churches in a very low spiritual state!) exhorting the saints to seek a “baptism” or “anointing” of the Spirit? There is none! Second, to talk about first accepting Christ as Saviour and then surrendering to Him as Lord betrays a deplorable ignorance or perverting of the Scriptures: He must be received as Lord *before* He becomes the Saviour of any—the New Testament uniformly refers to Him as “Lord and Saviour” (2 Peter 3:2, 18), never as “Saviour and Lord!” Third, the closing sentences of the last paragraph are absurd: where is the truly born-again soul who seeks to overcome sin in his own strength? A prayerless Christian is a

contradiction in terms. The very fact that he *is* a Christian ensures that he has learned of his own powerlessness (Phil. 3:3), and that he now seeks grace and help from God.

Surely if ever there were a saint who fully surrendered the throne of his heart to the sceptre of Christ, who was filled with the Spirit, and who had entered into God's best for him in this life, it was the Apostle Paul. Was, then, *he* completely free from sin? Did he fully measure up to the standard of holiness God has set before us? Were there no faults and failings in his Christian life? Witness the sharp contention between him and Barnabas (Acts 15:39), and remember that it always takes two to make a quarrel. Hear him acknowledging "without were fightings, within (not all was perfect peace, but) were *fears*" (2 Cor. 7:5). Observe his vacillation in 2 Corinthians 7:8: first, determining to sharply rebuke their sin, then sorrowing because he had done so, lest their feelings had been unduly hurt, and then regretting that he had been sorry. If any reader be inclined to give ear to the errors we have mentioned above, we beseech him to candidly test them by the Apostle's own experience in Romans 7:14-24 and Philippians 3:11-14.—A.W.P.

Providence of God.

Joseph.

The *comeliness* of Joseph was a link in the chain of Providence that was essentially necessary to bring about the destined end. It was this that drew the attention of his mistress, and was the occasion of his being sent to prison. Accordingly, it is stated in this view by the inspired historian. Immediately before the account of her infamous attempt it is said, "Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured" (Gen. 39:6). Here we see not only a Divine Providence was immediately engaged in bringing about the imprisonment of Joseph, but that it was in the view of God even in the formation of Joseph. This comeliness was given him for the very purpose! Had Joseph been an ordinary man, he would not have been sent to prison. Had he not been a remarkably handsome man, his virtue would not have been put to the test. Beauty, and wealth, honour, and health are all blessings of Providence, for which they ought to be thankful who possess them. But they are all the occasions of trial; and without Divine strength to resist, temptation may be the occasion of fall and ruin. Let every Christian, then, watch and guard against the temptations to which his providential gifts may expose him. A victory over temptation, like that of Joseph, is never to be expected, except in the strength of the faith and of the God of Abraham.

It might be supposed that if Providence overrules and directs all things, the interests, and especially the characters of God's people, would always be safe and unassailed. Would any parent allow slander to exist even for a moment, or even to originate against his beloved children, if he were able to prevent it? But God's ways are not as our ways. Here we see (Gen. 39:13) that instead of keeping His people from injury and the tongue of slander, it is by the means of false accusation that Providence brings Joseph to prison. The man of God is aspersed with calumny, and charged with sins which he had resisted under temptation of the strongest kind. That part of his character which is the admiration of every age, was the very part in which he suffered. A character was fixed on him, remarkable for crimes of which he was not only innocent, but to which he possessed the contrary virtues in a degree beyond any instances on record. And this false accusation had a plausibility that imposed on integrity, and prevailed, without anything for a long time to counteract it, keeping him in the bondage of prison. There is no security, then, to the people of God, that their lives, their property, and their characters may not be taken away unjustly. There may be occasion when Providence will open a door for any, or for all, of these calamities. But this will never be the case except it shall be for the glory of God, and for the good of the suffering individual. And, when in prison, Joseph was rendered comfortable by Providential interference. If his character was unjustly taken away, it was restored in the fullest manner; and the virtues of his illustrious character are a perpetual record to his honour.

It is usually considered that *circumstances* are the strongest evidences, and that, when facts may be forged, circumstances are expelled. Facts, supported by circumstances, are no doubt evidence beyond just question. But circumstances should not be admitted as decisive without a full consideration of their bearing. Here (Gen. 39:12) was a circumstance, apparently so strong against Joseph, that at first view it is useless for counsel to attempt to extricate him. He leaves his cloak behind him. Can there be better evidence of the fact alleged, and of his guilt? Yet, when the thing is considered for a moment in a dispassionate manner, the circumstance is not quite so conclusive. No wonder Potiphar had

not the coolness to weigh evidence on this occasion; but we may do it for him. Why, wife of Potiphar, did you on that occasion act so courageous a part, instead of flying for refuge to some secure part of the house? Were you more intent to secure the culprit as a prisoner than to protect yourself from his insult? What need was there that you should seize him? Could your slave escape you? or would your husband be so incredulous as to not believe you? Joseph, you are the injured man, and this is a vile woman. She is not urged by a sense of duty to punish you, but instigated by revenge to ruin you, an innocent man. And I have known, on occasions of accusations, some upright and impartial men ready, from a false interpretation of circumstances, to condemn the innocent on the evidence of false accusers. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding the leanings of modern times to the side of mercy, there are still occasionally some instances in which the innocent suffer from a false interpretation of circumstances. When Providence, in any instance, has ordained this issue, vigilance is in some way unaccountably asleep, and a strong disposition to punish flagrant injustice leads away from a cool consideration of the necessary import of circumstances. Joseph was ordered on this occasion to go to prison, therefore the deficiency in the evidence of circumstances did not occur to those who judged. No wonder that Potiphar should not be very suspicious to observe the flaw in the testimony. It is not either guilt or innocence, strictly speaking, that determines the fate of the accused at human tribunals. Innocence may be overwhelmed with calumny, and guilt may escape the keen eye of the most rigorous justice and the most conclusive evidence. The lot of the prisoner is decided *by Providence*, whether he unjustly suffers or is unjustly cleared.—Alexander Carson.