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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

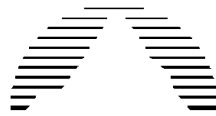
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST

We wonder how many of our readers have ever heard a sermon or read an article on this precious subject. We wonder how many of His people are accustomed to think of Christ in this blessed relationship. If the answer be, "Few," that is indeed pathetic and tragic. Christ is the best *Friend* that the Christian has, and it is both his unspeakable privilege and bounden duty to regard Him as such and to treat Him accordingly. Our Scriptural support for those statements is found in the following passages, among others. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Pro 18:24). That can refer to none other than the Lord Jesus, the Lover of our souls. "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:16). That is the language of His Spouse, the testimony of the Church, avowing this most intimate and blissful relationship. Add to these the witness of the New Testament when in the days of His flesh, Christ was termed "a friend of publicans and sinners!" (Luk 7:34), and our warrant is clearly established.

There are many and varied relations in which Christ stands to a believer, and he is greatly the loser if He be ignored in any of them. Christ is the God, Lord, Head, Saviour of the Church. Officially, He is our Prophet, Priest, and King. Personally, He is our Kinsman-Redeemer, our Intercessor, our "Friend." That title expresses the *near union* there is between the Lord Jesus and believers: They are as if but one soul actuated them—indeed, one and the same spirit does, for "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1Co 6:17). "Christ stands in a nearer relation than a brother to the Church: He is her Husband, her Bosom-friend" (John Gill, 1697-1771). "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph 5:30). But even those relations fall short of fully expressing the nearness, spiritual oneness, and indissolubleness of the union which exists between Christ and His people. There should, then, be the freest approaches unto Him and the most intimate fellowship with Him. To deny Christ, *that* is to ignore the fact that He *is* our best "Friend."

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Pro 18:24). That endearing title not only expresses the near relation there is between Him and His redeemed, but the *affection* which He ever bears them. Nothing has, does, or can, dampen—much less quench—the outflow of the same: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1). That blessed title of Christ's tells of the *sympathy* He bears to His people in all their sufferings and sorrows, their temptations and infirmities. "In all their affliction he was afflicted...in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa 63:9)—what demonstrations of His friendship are those! That blessed title also tells of His deep *concern* in our cause and interests. He has our highest welfare at heart, and accordingly, He has promised, "I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer 32:40).

Let us consider more definitely the excellencies of our best Friend. Christ is an *ancient* Friend. Old friends are prized most highly. The Lord Jesus was our Friend when we were His enemies! We fell in Adam, but He ceased not to love us; nay, He became the last Adam to redeem us and laid down "his life for his friends" (Joh 15:13). He sent His servants to preach the Gospel unto us, but we despised it. Even when we were wandering in the ways of folly, He determined to save us, and watched over us. In the midst of our sinning and sporting with death, He arrested us by His grace; and by His love and power, overcame our enmity and won our hearts unto Himself.

Christ is a *constant* Friend, One that "loveth at all times" (Pro 17:17). He continues to be our Friend through all the vicissitudes of life. No "fair-weather friend" is He, who fails us when we most need him. He is our Friend in the day of adversity, equally as much as in the day of prosperity. Was He not so to poor Peter! He is "a very present help in trouble" (Psa 46:1), and evidences it by His supporting and sustaining grace. Nor do our iniquities and transgressions turn away His compassion from us: even then He acts the part of a friend toward us—"if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jo 2:1).

Christ is a *faithful* Friend. His grace is not shown at the expense of righteousness, nor do His mercies ignore the requirements of holiness. Christ ever has in view both the glory of God and the highest good of His people. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Pro 27:6). A real friend loyally performs his duty in pointing out to me my faults. In this respect, too, does Christ "shew himself friendly" (Pro 18:24). Often has He occasion to say unto each of us, "I have a few things against thee" (Rev 2:14); and then it is by that, He rebukes by His Word, convicts our conscience by His Spirit, and chastens us by His providences: "That we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb 12:10).

Christ is a *powerful* Friend. He is not only willing, but able to help us. Some of our earthly friends have the desire to assist us in the hour of need, but lack the necessary wherewithal. Not so our heavenly Friend: Not only has He the heart to assist us, but also the power. He is the Possessor of “unsearchable riches” and all that He has is at our disposal: “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them” (Joh 17:22). We have a Friend at Court, for Christ uses His meritorious influence with the Father on our behalf: “He ever liveth to make intercession” for us (Heb 7:25). No situation can possibly arise with us, which would be beyond the resources of Christ.

Christ is an *everlasting* Friend. He deserts us not in the hour of our supreme crisis: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psa 23:4). Nor does death itself sever us from this Friend who “sticketh closer than a brother”—for so far from calling upon us to sojourn in a papish purgatory, we are with Him that very day in Paradise. Death will have separated us from those on earth, but “absent from the body” we shall be “present with the Lord” in Heaven (2Co 5:8). And in the future Day of judgment, Christ will manifest Himself as our Friend, saying, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat 25:21, 23).

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

24. Ephesians 1:15-23, part 10

That which is set before us in the closing verses of Ephesians 1 is purely a matter of Divine revelation, and therefore, can be received and enjoyed only by a God-given faith. What is there made known to us by the Holy Spirit is wholly beyond the reach of physical observation and completely transcends the realm of Christian "experience." That God has seated Christ at His own right hand is plainly affirmed in the Word of Truth: Though it lies far above the present verification of our senses; nevertheless, it is a glorious fact which faith unhesitatingly receives upon Divine authority. The same is equally true of the other things here mentioned. Christ's exaltation over the celestial hosts, all things being put under His feet, the use He is now making of His mighty power, and the relations which the Church sustains to Him, transcend the sphere of our senses—they are things which can neither be seen nor felt by us, yet they are real and glorious to faith. Unless *that* be firmly grasped by the expositor, he is bound to err in his interpretation of the details.

The exaltation of Christ is exhibited to us under the double metaphor of God's *seating* Him at His own *right hand*, which signifies (in brief) the investing of the Mediator with that supreme governmental authority, which hitherto had been exercised by God alone: The scepter of the universe is now wielded by the God-man, Christ Jesus. What follows is an account of the distinctive honours, which have been conferred upon Him. First, He has been advanced "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph 1:21)—all intelligences being reduced to one common level is certainly not the law or principle which obtains in Heaven! Nor are they in the kingdom over which Satan now presides, as Ephesians 6:12 makes clear. The glory of a king lies not only in his having subjects, but in his having a "court" or subjects of varying ranks: Commoners, knights, nobles—dukes, marquises, earls, etc. Such is the glorious court of the King of kings.

Second, all creatures are *set in subjection* to Christ, for that is the meaning of "And hath put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22)—an expression importing the highest sovereignty and power. Christ is not only elevated above all creatures, but He has dominion over them: They are subordinated to Him and governed by Him. Jesus Christ has been "made...Lord" (Act 2:36), "he is Lord of all" (Act 10:36), He is "Lord over all" (Rom 10:12), He is "Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom 14:9). The One who died at Calvary is now the Ruler of the universe. This very day He holds in His hand, "the keys of hell and of death" (Rev 1:18). Since the hour of His ascension He has been "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). At this moment He is ruling "in the midst of thine enemies" (Psa 110:2). "And hath put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22) is an accomplished fact and not a future prospect, though He still awaits the final subjugation of His foes. Christ is Lord over all, little as the profane world realises and owns it. It is a present reality, though the full results of it "doth not yet appear" (1Jo 3:2)—to our senses.

This investing of the Mediator with universal dominion was the subject of Old Testament prophecy. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with [or "in"] the clouds of heaven [*i.e.*, in manifested majesty], and came to [*not* "from!"] the Ancient of days, and they [His celestial attendants] brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14). The words, "one *like* the Son of man" (compare Rev 1:13; 14:14) need occasion no difficulty: It is the selfsame Person who is so frequently designated "the Son of man" in the first three Gospels but in an altered state—then in abasement and humiliation, now exalted and glorified. "The Ancient of days" signifies the Father: From Him Christ came to this earth (Joh 16:28), to Him He returned (Joh 20:17), by Him He was then rewarded and enthroned. The verb "*hath put* all things under his feet," assures us that this prediction has been fulfilled.

"And hath put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22) is another metaphor, but its meaning is plain—namely, that God hath exalted Christ to such dignity and dominion that everything is under His power, *in subjection to Him*. This is clear from the first passage in which the expression occurs: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psa 8:6)—the one clause defining the other. The scope of that "all things" is amplified in the words that follow: "All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psa 8:7-8). As Hebrews 2:8 still further points out: "For in that he put [*not* "will put" in some future era] all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put

under him:..."—nothing visible or invisible, in heaven or earth, friend or foe—"...But now we see not [with our natural eyes] yet all things put under him"—though we shall one day behold that too. Meanwhile, "we see Jesus [with the eyes of faith]...crowned with glory and honour" (Heb 2:9), as exhibited in the closing verses of Ephesians 1.

"And hath put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22). As is so often the case, many of the commentators have unwarrantably restricted the scope of these words, limiting them unto the subjugation of His *enemies*. Undoubtedly, that is part of their meaning, yet their primary significance and extent is the subjection of all—friends and foes alike. "All the people that follow thee"—Pharaoh (Exo 11:8) and "all the people that follow me"—Benhadad (1Ki 20:10) is rightly rendered in the margin, "are at thy feet" and "at my feet," so that it is all one to say: All the people that are thy subjects (who own thy scepter) or "at thy feet." As we have seen, "Thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psa 8:6) is interpreted in "Thou hast put all things *in subjection* under his feet" and that "nothing" is excepted (Heb 2:8). "To bow the head to another is a token of reverence, but to fall down at his feet is to express the utmost subjection" (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680).

There should be no difficulty in perceiving this expression is applicable and appropriate to the holy angels: Their subjection to Christ is a voluntary and joyous one; nor to the Church, for He is its Head, and each of its members is made "willing in the day of thy [His] power" (Psa 110:3) to submit to His rule. That is exactly what is meant by "take my yoke upon you" (Mat 11:29): "Yield to My Lordship, give Me the throne of your hearts, surrender your will to My governance." When the Church is spoken of as the Body of Christ, that sets forth her dignity, yet He being the "*head of the church*" (Eph 5:23) expresses His superior dignity. The king's consort sustains a *double* relation to him: As the monarch, she is a subject, but as his wife, she is a queen. Hence, while in Psalm 45:9, it is said of Christ, "upon thy right hand did stand the queen," and it is added, "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty;" yet she is at once told, "he is thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Psa 45:11)—be subject to and adore Him.

But the expression also refers to Christ's triumph over His enemies. After Joshua had gained that remarkable victory over the combined armies of the Canaanites, he said, "Open the mouth of the cave [into which they had fled] and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave. And they did so" (Jos 10:22-23). And he said to his captains, "Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings" (Jos 10:24), and they did so. "And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies" (Jos 10:25). "But I will put it [the cup of God's fury] into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over," etc., (Isa 51:22-23). It is to such passages as Psalm 110:1 alludes: "Until I make thine enemies thy footstool"—*i.e.*, to be crushed and destroyed. The Church is under Christ's feet by way of subjection, but she is not His "footstool" by way of subjugation and degradation.

Yet we believe that "hath put all things under his feet" (Eph 1:22) includes even more than what T. Goodwin brought out: Not only all friends by way of voluntary submission and all foes by forced subjugation, but *all events* by way of His immediate operation. It is not simply "all creatures," but "all things." Providence itself is now directed by the Mediator: All history is shaped by His imperial hand. Every movement, every occurrence—both in heaven and in earth—is ordered by the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is clothed with all authority and invested with universal dominion, and He is now actually engaged in exercising the same. But let it not be overlooked that the exaltation and sovereignty of Christ is revealed in Scripture as something more than a historical reality: The very fact it is here brought in at the close of the apostle's prayer intimates it is a grand truth which ought to affect our hearts and lives. Do we conduct ourselves as those in complete subjection to Him? As we view those who oppose us, do we realise the force of His "Fear not, little flock" (Luk 12:32)? As we contemplate the troubled waters of this world, do we recognise that our mighty Captain is at the helm?

"And gave him to be the head over all things to the church," (Eph 1:22). That means far more than that Christ is the Church's Head, which is how T. Goodwin strangely limited it. In those words and the ones which follow the Holy Spirit reveals some of the distinctive blessings which accrue unto the redeemed as the result of the exaltation of the Redeemer. It was not only for the sake of His Son that God placed Him upon the throne, but it was also for the benefit of the Church. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that [in order that] he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (Joh 17:2) is a parallel statement—though not quite as broad in its terms. Christ has been given universal and absolute rule over the whole of creation; and this, that He might bestow eternal life upon the elect. It is the fact that "All

power is given unto me [Christ] in heaven and in earth," which gives force to the "Go ye *therefore*, and teach all nations" (Mat 28:18-19)—no weapon formed against His servants shall or can prosper.

Absolute Lordship has been conferred upon the Mediator with the particular design of advantage to His blood-bought people. Christ's universal Headship and power is being employed in the service of His beloved. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour..."—with what design?—"...to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Act 5:31): Christ has been elevated so high that He may disburse the gifts of salvation unto those who belong to the spiritual Israel—"the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). He has not only gone into heaven to "prepare a place" for His own (Joh 14:2), but He is also active on their behalf while they are upon earth. Upon His ascension, we are told that "they [His ambassadors] went forth, and preached every where, the Lord *working* with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mar 16:20). And so completely is He ordering all the affairs of providence on behalf of His saints, so thoroughly are their enemies beneath His control, it is said, "all things are for your sakes" (2Co 4:15).

It is great importance that we should consider and apprehend God's object in subjecting all things unto the Redeemer: Not only as illustrating the principles of His moral government—"he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luk 14:11), "them that honour me I will honour" (1Sa 2:30), and the good which results to us therefrom—but also the bearing which it should have upon our character and conduct. The salvation of the Church was the direct design of the whole of Christ's mediation. It was for her He voluntarily suffered humiliation and death, and it was for the promotion of her interests God exalted Christ and that He now employs for her benefit the powers which have been bestowed upon Him. Though raised so high, He has neither lost His love for His sheep, nor relinquished His purpose concerning them. All hearts are now in His hand: by Him "kings reign, and princes decree justice" (Pro 8:15), yet He is exercising His dominion in subserviency to His purpose of grace, disposing all the affairs of the universe for the good of His Church: to the accomplishment of *that* the whole series of events which forms the history of individuals and nations is directed and subordinated.

Yet how faintly is that realised by any of us—that Christ is over men and angels, demons and Satan himself. This world is under the control of the One whose hands were nailed to the cross. Christ rules and overrules for the good of His Church the deliberations of the senate, the conflict of armies, the history of the nations. The Nero's, the Charlmagne's, the Napoleon's, the Hitler's—who, for a brief season, proudly strut upon the stage of this world's drama—are but puppets in the hand of the enthroned Christ and are made to accomplish His purpose and serve the highest and ultimate interests of His people. Even when the nations are convulsed like the angry sea, and it appears to carnal sight and reason that things have got quite out of control, "The LORD hath *his way* in the whirlwind and in the storm" (Nah 1:3). Then there is nothing for us to be alarmed at: The ark of the covenant is in no danger!

"And gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22). To the angels, Christ is a "head" by virtue of sovereignty and power (Col 2:10), but He is the Church's "head" by mystical union as well: They are but His servants, the Church is His Spouse. He is the Church's "head" first by way of *distinction*, as her King and Lord, "for in all *things* he might have the preeminence" (Col 1:18). Second, by way of *authority*: "The church is subject unto Christ" (Eph 5:24), so that in all spiritual matters, she refuses domination or direction by either state or people. Third, in a way of *influence*: Receiving her life, strength, and grace from Him—"from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered" (Col 2:19 and compare Eph 4:16). All her springs are in Him: from His fulness she receives. Christ is not only a commanding but a compassionate Head, and therefore, is touched with the feeling of her infirmities.

"The church which is his body." Christ has a natural body, by virtue of His incarnation. He has a sacramental body, which is seen in "The Lord's supper." He has a ministerial body, the local assembly (1Co 12:27) where His ordinances are administered and His truth proclaimed. He has also a *mystical Body*, so designated because the mysterious union of its members with one another and with their Head is altogether beyond the purview of our physical senses. It is this, we believe, which is here meant: As in Ephesians 4:12-13 (which has never been realised by any church on earth); the Church for which Christ gave himself (Eph 5:25)—which cannot be restricted to any local assembly; "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb 12:23), which is the sum total of all God's elect. That mystical Body has been in process of formation since the days of Abel and will not be completed until the end of human history.

View this controversial expression in the light of what precedes. Christ's being seated at God's right hand is perceptible to faith alone. All things being put under His feet is not cognisable by our senses: "Now we *see not* yet all things put under him" (Heb 2:8), neither do we yet see "the Church which is His body." Contemplate it in the light of what follows: The Church is not only the Body of Christ, but also "*the fulness* of him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23), which could never be said of any local assembly, nor even any denomination. The Church is the Mediatorial "fulness" of Christ: There cannot be a Redeemer without redeemed, a Shepherd without sheep, a Bridegroom without a Bride, a living Head without a living Body. He is *her* "fulness" (Joh 1:16) as the Lord of life and grace; she is *His* fulness as it is by means of the glory He has put upon her that He will hereafter be magnified (1Th 1:10).

We conclude as we began. The relation of the Church unto Christ is entirely a matter of Divine revelation. Verses 21-23 bring before us that which pertains wholly unto *faith*—not fiction or fancy, nor reason nor sense. But though each of these objects is as yet unseen by the outward eye, they are none the less *real*, and shall yet be beheld by a wondering universe. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which constitutes the Church, Christ's mystical Body, for only those He indwells are members of *it*. The Church is Christ's "fulness" as it completes His mystical Person: The Head and the Body form the *mystical* "Christ" of 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:13, and perhaps Galatians 3:16. This inestimable honour Christ placed not on angels: They are neither His "body" nor "His fulness." He loved His mystical Body above His natural body, for He gave the one for the other.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

4. *The Great Commission (Joshua 1:1-9)*

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua” (Jos 1:1). The opening word of this verse, when rightly rendered, supplies to the spiritual mind an indication of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Properly translated, it would be “And,” and what uninspired writer would ever think of beginning his production with such a connective! John Urquhart in his “The Bible: Its Structure and Purpose” (vol. 1) called attention to this feature, which though a minute detail is one of considerable importance—namely, that many of the books of the Old Testament Commence with the conjunction “ve.” This indicates, of course, that those which open thus are so closely linked with the ones preceding that they are really *continuations* of them. But, we may say, it does more than that: The employment of “And” at the beginning of quite a number of them signifies that they are not so many books, but chapters in the Book. In other words, this binding together of the various books by the copulative “And” gives more than a hint of their fundamental unity: that one Author composed them, that one Rule of Faith is found in them.

Genesis has no “And” at the commencement of its opening verse, for the simple reason that it is the first book or chapter, the beginning. But Exodus opens with this connective “ve”—“and”—rendered there, “Now.” So does Leviticus, and likewise, Numbers. Thereby, we are taught that those first books are inseparably united together, and form the first division of the Bible. But, as Urquhart pointed out, “It is a surprise at first glance when we find that Deuteronomy, which is regarded as the completion of the four previous books, is, as a fact, disconnected from them.” He might also have dwelt on the fact that such a variation or difference is a designed evidence of Divine superintendence. The very fact that Deuteronomy is regarded (and from one standpoint, rightly so) as the completion of the Pentateuch argues, that were the first five books of the Bible nothing more than the uninspired productions of Jews, writing in collaboration, the fifth one had been brought into accord with those which precede it.

The absence of “and” at the opening of Deuteronomy at once intimates that that book is not a supplement to what has gone before, but rather, a new beginning, or a new division of the Old Testament. It looks forward and not backward: A careful study of its contents will verify this. Joshua comes next, and it *does* open with “And”—and so does every book which follows until 1 Chronicles is reached! Thus, Joshua to the end of 2 Kings is annexed to Deuteronomy, and the whole forms the second division of the Old Testament. Having pointed out this feature, let us pause and consider its significance. Why are the first four books of the Bible coupled together? Why the next eight? And why does Deuteronomy belong to the second group rather than the first? The answer must be sought in the history of Israel, for that is the theme of the Old Testament. The first four books give us the history of Israel *outside* the *Land*, which was promised them for an inheritance; the next eight treat of their history, *in it*. Deuteronomy rehearses the past history of the Nation and restates the Law in view of their approaching possession of Canaan, informing them how they must conduct themselves therein.

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD” (Jos 1:1). The removal of Moses from their head was a heavy loss unto Israel. For many years, he had been their leader and legislator. It was under him they had been delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt. It was in answer to his prayers that a way was opened for them through the Red Sea. He was the one who acted as their representative before the Lord, and as His mouthpiece unto them. It is true, there were times when they distrusted him and murmured against him; yet, on the whole, they respected and confided in him. A stage had now been reached when it seemed that Israel needed him more than ever, for with practically no fighting experience and possessing scarcely any weapons, they were about to pit themselves against the “seven nations in the land of Canaan” (Act 13:19). Yet he was no longer to be their commander: Death took him from them. That was a deep mystery to carnal reason, a most painful providence, a sore trying of their faith. That they felt it keenly is clear: “And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days” (Deu 34:8).

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan” (Jos 1:1-2). The work of God is in nowise hindered by the decease of His servants, no matter how eminent they be in office, nor how much used in blessing to His people. Though the workmen be removed, His work goes forward to its ordained completion. “God will change hands to show that whatever

instruments He uses, He is not tied to any" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). That does not mean that God will necessarily supply another pastor for a church when one has died, for His work in that particular place may be finished; or that when His time arrives for the work of this magazine to end, that He will provide another; but it *does mean* that He will continue to maintain His Cause upon earth and supply every need of His people. That is certain, and it should both comfort and inspire us with courage in these dark days in which our lot is cast.

It is to be duly noted that Joshua did not push himself forward to fill the breach made by the departure of Moses, but waited until ordered by the Lord to do so. The relation which he sustained to his predecessor is not only one of interest, but also of deep importance—not so much so from a historical standpoint as from the typical and doctrinal. This is the point at which we should amplify that statement at some length, but we are afraid to do so, lest some of our readers wonder if we are ever going to "get down to business"—for we have already written three articles without taking up the opening verses of our book. Yet others will say, "What does that matter if their contents were instructive and profitable?" We will, therefore, adopt a compromise, and defer our remarks upon that subject until a little later. Meanwhile, perhaps a few may be stimulated to ponder and supply answers for themselves to the following questions: "What was the varied relationship of Joshua unto Moses? And what important truth is illustrated and illuminated thereby?"

"Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel" (Jos 1:2). The appointed time had now arrived for Jehovah to make good the promises which He had made to Abraham and his children long centuries before. All that had been accomplished through Moses was but preliminary thereto, yet supplying a sure earnest that He would continue to show Himself strong on their behalf—so long as they adhered strictly to the covenant which He had entered into with them at Sinai. For that covenant, and the earlier one, constituted the basis of all His dealings with Israel: While they kept it, they prospered; when they broke it, they experienced His judgments. It is to be duly observed that this commission which Joshua here received from the Lord was given to him as the head of Israel. It was made not with him alone, but the nation as well: "Thou, and all this people" (Jos 1:2). This needs to be borne in mind in connection with all that follows.

"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I *given* unto you, as I said unto Moses" (Jos 1:3). Here again (see previous verse), the Lord emphasised the fact that Canaan was a sovereign and free gift which He made unto Israel. It was not a portion to which they were in any wise entitled: Neither they, nor their ancestors, had done anything to merit such a heritage, nor would their subsequent prowess in conquering or dispossessing the Canaanites warrant the idea that they had earned it. Thus, it is with the eternal inheritance of the spiritual Israel. When they are finally gathered into it, they will, with one accord exclaim, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psa 115:1). And even now while upon earth, they frankly aver, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to *his mercy* he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). They one and all subscribe to that declaration, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

Nevertheless, though Canaan was a Divine gift unto Israel, yet they did not enter into possession of it without effort on their part: *Their* concurrence was required, and thereby, their responsibility was enforced! Unless that fact be clearly recognised, we shall be all at sea in applying the type unto ourselves, and seriously—aye fatally—pervert God's "plan" or way of salvation. There is not the slightest excuse for our doing so, for the teaching of Scripture on this subject—both in the type and the antitype—is as clear as a sunbeam. Canaan was first given unto Abraham, and he is "the father of all them that believe" (Rom 4:11); and therefore, his case is the norm or model after which ours is patterned. Concerning Abraham himself, all room for doubt as to *how he* obtained Canaan, is removed by Hebrews 11:8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place (which he should after receive for an inheritance), *obeyed*; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." It was by faith-obedience that Canaan became his.

What has just been pointed out and our placing that clause in parenthesis is clearly confirmed by Genesis 12:1: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will *shew* thee." There was no promise at that time that the land would be made over to him for a possession: It was not until years after that God said to him, "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen 15:7). Abraham

was first required to break completely from his old life and separate from the world, to submit himself unreservedly to God, to walk by faith, to act in unquestioning obedience to His revealed will, *before* the heritage became his! Yes, my reader, the call which Abraham received from God made very real and definite demands upon him; and since he is “the father of us all” (Rom 4:16), each of his children must be conformed to the family likeness. Abraham is a figure or prototype of those who have, by grace, been made “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1).

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb 11:8)—still less knowing that the land would be given to him. A saving faith is one which heeds the Divine commandments, as well as relies upon the Divine promises. Make no mistake about that, dear friends, Christ is “the Author of salvation unto all them that *obey* Him” (Heb 5:9). Abraham obeyed not only in word, but in deed: “He went out” (Heb 11:8). In that, he was in marked contrast from the prevaricating one who said, “I go, sir: and went not” (Mat 21:30). Faith and obedience can no more be severed than can the sun and the light, fire and heat. Therefore, we read of “obedience to the faith” (Rom 1:5) “Obedience is faith’s daughter. Faith hath not only to do with the grace of God, but with the duty of the creature as well. By apprehending grace, it works upon duty: ‘Faith which worketh by love’ (Gal 5:6). It fills the soul with apprehensions of God’s love, and then makes use of the sweetness of love to urge us to more work or obedience” (T. Manton).

And now the descendants of Abraham were called upon to act by a similar faith and walk by the same implicit obedience unto God which had marked their progenitor! The Jordan must be crossed, cities must be captured, battles must be fought, the Canaanites conquered, *before* Israel could enter into possession of and enjoy their inheritance. True, blessedly true, they were not required to perform such feats in their own unaided strength: The might of Omnipotence would work on their behalf. Yet also—and equally true—was it that God would show Himself strong on their behalf only while they yielded to His authority and conducted themselves according to His orders. The Land was indeed His gift—His free and sovereign gift—unto them, yet they would only obtain possession of the same by their own efforts. There is nothing inharmonious between those two things, any more than there is an inconsistency in the Gospel call. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, *buy*, and eat; yea, come, *buy* wine and milk without money and *without price*” (Isa 55:1)—alas that that repeated “buy” is totally ignored by modern “evangelism.”

“Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast” (Jos 1:3-4). As we have pointed out in a previous paper, the contents of this book have a twofold application: an initial and a progressive, to the sinner and to the saint. That is intimated, we believe, by the very position Joshua occupies in the Sacred Canon: It sustains a *dual* relation—coming after, yet being linked to the Pentateuch, and also forming the commencement of the Historical books. That hints strongly at a twofold spiritual significance of its contents. Concerning the land of Canaan, Moses said to the Congregation, “For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you” (Deu 12:9). In contrast from the wanderings in the Wilderness, Canaan was their “rest,” but in actual experience, their entrance into the Land marked the beginning of years of hard fighting. The moment a sinner believes in Christ’s peace of conscience, rest of soul is his; nevertheless, only then begins the fierce battle between the flesh and the spirit.

That rest of soul enjoyed by the Christian when he ceases fighting against God and trusts in the Saviour is an earnest of his inheritance, a foretaste of the perfect and eternal rest awaiting him on high. The initial act of faith in Christ puts him in possession of an inalienable title to “the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14), but his actual entrance therein is yet future. But it is both his privilege and duty to “possess...[his] possessions” (Oba 1:17)—even now, to enjoy them by faith and anticipate them by hope. It is his privilege and duty to appropriate by faith and live in the present enjoyment of that rich portion which God has given him in Christ. But the flesh, the world, and the Devil will oppose, and seek to keep him out of a present enjoyment of his possession. There is nothing the Devil hates more than to see a saint glorying in God and rejoicing in Christ his Lord; and therefore, both directly and by means of indwelling sin, or the allurements and cares of this world, he is ever seeking to deprive him of his rights. But if we mortify the flesh, steadfastly resist the Devil, live a life of faith and walk obediently, we can overcome both self, Satan, and the world.

In this connection, we need to recall that word of the Lord unto Israel at an earlier date: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. *By little and little* I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Exo 23:29-30), which shows that God does not act arbitrarily, but compassionately with respect to His people. To their short-sightedness, it might have appeared a more signal mercy had God exterminated the Canaanites in the first few months after the crossing of its boundary, but that had neither been most for His glory nor their good. There were wild beasts in the land, as well as gross idolaters, and even though the latter had been extirpated, Israel were yet too few in number to properly occupy the whole of the country—they must wait for that until they had sufficiently multiplied. Moreover, by driving out the Canaanites from before them "little by little," Israel was kept in a state of constant dependence before the Lord. That is one of His principal designs in all His dealings with people: To wean them from self-reliance and teach them to lean more and more upon Himself.

The spiritual application to the Christian of the above is simple and informative. God has nowhere promised to give him victory over all his enemies at once; and therefore, he should not expect it. Nor would it be good for him if He did—pride and self-esteem would be the immediate outcome. "And therefore will the LORD *wait*, that he may be gracious unto you" (Isa 30:18). He has many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them now (Joh 16:12); and He has victories to give us, but we are not yet fitted for them. As Israel were not to be discouraged by the slowness of their arms, neither must we be dismayed if victory be not ours at once—still less entertaining the thought that success will never be achieved by us. In like manner, the possessing of our possessions, the present entering into and enjoyment of our heritage in Christ, is not attained all in a moment, but it is a progressive experience—"by little and little." Growth in grace is not an instantaneous thing like the new birth, but a gradual one: Patience has to have her perfect work.

Perhaps some reader may recall another word of Jehovah's spoken before the Jordan was crossed: "The LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: *so* shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them *quickly*" (Deu 9:3). We need hardly say that there is no conflict between this passage and the one in Exodus 23, for there are *no* "contradictions" in the Word of God. All that is needed is a little careful attention to each passage. The "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year" of Exodus 23:29 has reference to the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites, as the previous verse shows; whereas the "them" of Deuteronomy 9:3 is the Anakim—see verse 2. Nor does this present any difficulty in the spiritual application: There *are* some enemies which the Christian is enabled to overcome "quickly," while there are others which continue to try him unto the end of his earthly course.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

8d. Its Scope

It is not sufficiently realised that *sin* is the one great divisive, disrupting, and destructive agency at work in every part and stratum of our world. It was sin that separated man from God, which produced a breach between him and the holy angels, and which operates to the alienating of one man from another. Among the many and dreadful effects of the Fall (which was itself an expression of enmity against God) is the enmity between man and the man which has issued from it. That abominable thing which caused Adam to be driven out of Eden swiftly exhibited itself in the murderous hatred of Cain for Abel. Sin has not only bred a quarrel with God, but between man and man, between brother and brother, between nation and nation. Not only do the unregenerate hate the regenerate, but they live “in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). The whole of human history is little more than a sad record of man’s enmity against man—modified (though not eradicated) only where the Gospel has taken root.

As one has truly said, “There is in every man, if his nature were let out to the full, that in him which is ‘against every man’ as was said of Ishmael.” Self-love is the greatest monopolist and dictator in this world: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves.” What immediately follows? “Covetous ... disobedient to parents... without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good” (2Ti 3:2-3). Self-love is the regulating principle in every natural man. Self-love breaks all bonds and overrides all other considerations. And self-love is but another name for sin, for so far from seeking God’s glory of the good of my fellows, it selfishly considers only my own interests. Since each nation is but an aggregate of individual sinners, self-interests regulate it; and therefore, the nations are kept in a state of continual suspicion, jealousy, and enmity one against another.

Now, since Christ is the Saviour, and the only Saviour from sin, to Him was appointed the honour of healing the breaches made by sin. We have already seen how He reconciled God unto the Church and the Church unto Him, as we also dwelt at some length on His reconciliation of the Church to the celestial hosts, forming them into one holy and harmonious company. We are now to consider how He brought into the Church, welding them into one Body, two diverse peoples who had for many centuries been widely separated, and bitterly hostile to each other. That was indeed a miracle of grace, constituting as it does one of the greatest and grandest triumphs of the Atonement. We refer of course to the making of the Gentiles as “fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph 3:6) with Jews. To appreciate that marvel, let us carefully behold the awful and age-long alienation that existed between them.

We begin by contemplating that of the Jews against the Gentiles, for the quarrel originated with *them*. This is clearly intimated by “Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision” (Eph 2:11), for the word “called” there signified “dubbed.” It was the Jews who *first* began using nick-names! Out of their carnal pride, they misused the privilege bestowed upon them by God as His peculiar people, to scorn the poor Gentiles—and this, almost from the beginning. The sons of Jacob said, “To give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us” (Gen 34:14), and afterwards, the whole race of Jews, good and bad, used the term “uncircumcised” as a *stigma*—as by Samson (Jdg 15:18), by Jonathan (1Sa 14:6), David (1Sa 17:26, 36), Saul (1Sa 31:4). Yea, they regarded it as worse than death itself to “die by the hands of the uncircumcised” or have “the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph” (2Sa 1:20). When they would accurse to the most degraded death, it was, “Let him die the death of the uncircumcised.”

This enmity of the Jews was expressed in their attitude toward and dealings with the Gentiles. Not only was there no communion between them in sacred things, but they deemed it an abomination to have any social intercourse with the Gentiles. In the latter, they erred grievously, through perverting a particular precept, given upon a special ground, and making it of general application. Concerning the Ammonites and Moabites, the Lord had said, “Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever” (Deu 23:6), but as though foreseeing that the evil spirit in them would develop into a hatred of all nations and to prevent a wrong use of that precept, in the very next verse, God bade them, “Thou shalt *not* abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land” (Deu 23:7). Yet the Jews ever carried themselves toward the Gentiles as though they were the scum of the earth.

Hence, it was that when our Saviour asked water from the woman at the well, she was astonished and said, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Joh 4:9). Yea, so intense was their animosity against the Gentiles, that the Jews would have killed Paul for no other crime than this that he "brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place" (Act 21:28, 31). Malice could not rise higher in any people against another than it did in the Jews for the Gentiles. They carried it so far that the apostle tells us, "They please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved" (1Th 2:15-16). What hope was there of such enmity being removed, and of peace, love, and concord displacing it?

How strong the Jewish prejudice was, how powerful the working of his enmity against the Gentiles, appears in him even *after* his conversion. This is forcibly illustrated in Acts 10, where we find God giving Peter a special vision in order to overcome his disinclination to carry the Gospel to those outside the pale of Judaism. When he arrived at the house of Cornelius, he frankly admitted, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Act 10:28). When this good news reached Jerusalem that "the Gentiles had also received the word of god" (Act 11:1) and Peter returned to the brethren there, we are told that, so far from rejoicing over these new trophies of Divine grace, "they that were of the circumcision *contended* with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Act 11:1-3).

Naturally, the Gentiles resented their being held in such contempt by the Jews and were not slow to retaliate, though it must be confessed they were the more moderate of the two. And this was a righteous judgment upon them from God: "And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them" (Jer 24:9). In the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, amongst which the Jews were scattered; and in which they had enemies in all, it was only by special letters of appeal from the king that the Gentiles were restrained from falling on them (Est 8:9 and compare Est 9:16). They were accused of being "hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time" (Ezr 4:15). When the apostles were arrested at Philippi, the charge preferred against them was: "These men, *being Jews*, do exceedingly trouble our city" (Act 16:20).

But more. God Himself has made a distinction and difference between them, having dealt with and favoured Israel as no other nation upon earth (Amos 3:2). He had assigned them their own special land, giving them a particular code of laws—moral, civil, and religious—and set up His own exclusive worship in their midst. He had made of them a peculiar polity, having great privileges exclusive to itself, such as no other people ever enjoyed. From all of that, the Gentiles were Divinely barred. As the apostle declares, they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Those consequences followed from their being "without Christ"—for He is both the substance and end of the covenants of Israel and the Revealer of God, and so of spiritual life. But in Christ, all fleshly distinctions disappear; and through His mediation, the Gentiles have been made partakers of Israel's "spiritual things" (Rom 15:27). This is shown at length in Ephesians 2:14-22, unto which we now turn.

In approaching that passage, it needs to be borne in mind that the Spirit's principal design therein, as in all His ministrations, is to *exalt Christ* in our esteem. The incarnate Son glorified the Father on earth as He was never glorified here before or since; and therefore, He was entitled to ask, "Father...glorify thy Son" (Joh 17:1). That request received answer not only in His exaltation on High, not only in a redeemed people being quickened and united to Him to show forth His praises, but also in the *further revelation* made of Him in the New Testament. An illustration of that is now to be before us. The Spirit's object therein is to give us an eminent instance of the efficacy of Christ's mediation by bringing to pass that which the united efforts of all men could never have accomplished—namely, the slaying of an age-long and inveterate enmity which existed between the two great branches of the human family, from each of which God takes a remnant to exemplify His sovereign grace. Ephesians 2 shows us how Christ abolished that which was the means or occasion of alienation between them.

"For he is our peace" (Eph 2:14) *objectively*, what He is in Himself: As He is "OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer 23:6), "our life" (Col 3:4), "our hope" (1Ti 1:1)—though there is that which is correspondent to each wrought in us. He is "our peace," because He is Himself "the Prince of peace," and

because He is the great and glorious Peacemaker. Christ is at once the Author, the Substance, and Centre of peace. In what follows, the apostle supplies proofs or exemplifications: Christ is our peace between ourselves mutually, and He is our peace between God and us. The key to a right understanding of what follows lies in bearing in mind *that duality*. As Ephesians 2:11-13 exhibit a dual alienation—of Gentiles from Jews, of both from God—so verses 14-17 treat of a double reconciliation opposite thereto. And accordingly, in verses 18-22, we are shown the grand twofold privilege which results therefrom: Access into the favour of God (verse 18), the introduction of a new and united worship of Himself (verses 19-22).

“For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition” (Eph 2:14). He who is not only the Giver of peace, but the Peace itself, has united together believing Jews and Gentiles. Those who previously were alienated, are reconciled by Him, because He has broken down that which divided and separated them. Of old, God had “fenced” His vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-2 and compare Psalm 80:8 and Matthew 21:33-43); or as the margin reads it, “made a *wall* about it,” which had barred the Gentiles from an entrance into Israel’s spiritual things. The “middle wall of partition” (Eph 2:14) is an expression which connotes the separating cause which existed between Jew and Gentile, but which was demolished by Christ when He had—as the Representative and Surety of each alike—“made both one” in Himself. As Christ’s death rent the veil of the temple—the innermost barrier to God—so it destroyed the middle wall of partition.

“Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph 2:15). This tells us *how* Christ broke down that which divided. The middle wall of partition is now designated “the enmity;” and that, in turn, is described as “the law of commandments,” etc. Here, too, there is a double reference: First, to the ceremonial law of Moses which excluded Gentiles from the Jews. Second, to the Covenant of works which excluded both from God. “In [or “by”] his flesh” is the same as “by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13) and “by the cross” (Eph 2:16): By His sacrificial and atoning death, the Law—both as a ceremonial system and as a rule of justification—was annulled. In the parallel passage (Col 2:14), the word “ordinances” is connected with “the handwriting...that was against us”—that is, to a legal bond of indictment, which Christ took out of the way, “nailing it to his cross.”

“For to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15). In Ephesians 2:10, the believer is declared to be “his [God’s] workmanship,” but there, the glory of the creation is directly attributed to Christ, who is its Head and Life. The “twain” or “two” were the Jews and Gentiles who were separate and hostile bodies, alike the children of wrath and dead in trespasses and sins. They are created anew so as to become “one new man” (collectively); and this, by virtue of their federal union with Christ—hence the “in himself.” “So making peace”: The present participle is used because the operation is a continuous one—the work is done, but the fruit of it is progressive. The long feud in the human family is healed. In Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28)—both disappearing when the “enmity” that sundered them was abolished. There is now one fold, one Shepherd.

“And [or “Moreover”] that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:16). Here the “enmity” which Christ slew is the barrier which existed between God and men—created by sin; and not the enmity in our hearts against God, for it was slain by Christ’s death and not by the working of His *Spirit*. To “reconcile” is to effect peace and unity between parties at variance. Christ reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God by propitiating Him, by satisfying the demands of His Law; thereby making it possible for Him to be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. There is no room for any uncertainty here: It was “by the *cross*” that Christ effected the reconciliation: The proximate design of a sacrifice is to appease God, and not to convert those for whom the offering is made. “Having slain the enmity” both amplifies and explains “by the cross”: Christ’s death removed God’s wrath or judicial enmity from sinners.

“And came and preached peace to you which were afar off [the Gentiles], and to them that were [in outward privileges] nigh” (Eph 2:17). As the “enmity” of verse 16 is the legal enmity of God, so the “peace” here is that “peace with God” (Rom 5:1) into which Christ has brought all His redeemed. His “preaching” of it is after the Cross, and therefore through His apostles (*see* 2Co 5:20). It is the proclamation to those who savingly believe the Gospel that since the Law has been satisfied, God is no longer hostile to us. Proof of that is “For through him we both [believing Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18)—which had been impossible unless His wrath had been removed, or His enmity slain. Christ has done something very much more than simply “open a way to God.” He has actually *brought us* to God (1Pe 3:18), and inducted us into His grace or favour (Rom 5:2).

As God determined to magnify the exceeding riches of His grace by permitting the most heinous sins in the lives of some of those whom He chose unto salvation, so for the glory of His Son, He suffered the strongest and bitterest animosity to possess the hearts of Jews and Gentiles, that the efficacy of His mediation might be displayed in constituting them one new man in Himself—blessedly exemplified when those, who formerly would not eat with one another, sit down together to partake of the Lord's supper!

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

10c. Its Decline

Having dwelt at some length on the nature of spiritual decline and pointed out some of the principal causes thereof, a few words require to be said on its *insidiousness*. Sin is a spiritual disease (Psa 103:3); and like so many others, it works silently and unsuspected by us; and before we are aware of it, our health is gone. We are not sufficiently on our guard against "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13): Unless we resist its first workings, it soon obtains an advantage over us. Hence, we are exhorted, "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God" (Jos 23:11), for all spiritual decline may be traced back to a diminution of our love for Him. The love of God is of heav. We are not only surrounded with objects which attract our affections and Him.

In the early stages of the Christian life, love is usually fresh and fervent. The first believing views of the Gospel fill the heart with amazement and praise to the Lord, and a flow of grateful affection is the spontaneous outcome. The soul is profoundly moved, wholly absorbed with God's unspeakable gift, and weaned from all other objects. This is what God terms, "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jer 2:2). It is then that the one who has found such peace and joy exclaims, "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications [for mercy], Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live" (Psa 116:1-2). At that season, the renewed soul can scarcely conceive it possible to forget Him who has done such great things for it, or to lapse back in any measure to his former loves and lords; but if after twenty years of cares and temptations have passed over him without producing this effect, it will indeed be happy. There *are* some who experience no decline, but that is far from being the case with all.

There are those who speak of the Christian's departing from his first love as a matter of course, who regard it as something inevitable. Not a few elderly religious professors who have, themselves, become cold and carnal (if they ever had life in them), will seek to bring young and happy Christians to this doleful and God-dishonouring state of mind. With a sarcastic smile, they will tell the babe in Christ, "Though you be on the mount of enjoyment today, rest assured, it will not be long until you come down." But this is erroneous and utterly misleading. Not so did the apostles act towards young converts. When Barnabas visited the young Christians at Antioch, he "had seen the grace of God, [and] was glad" (Act 11:23); and so far from leading them to expect a state of decline from their initial fervour, assurance, and joy, he "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Act 11:23). While the great Head of the Church informed the Ephesian saints that He had it *against* them "because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4).

There is no reason or necessity in the nature of things why there should be any abatement in the Christian's love, zeal, or comfort. Those objects and considerations which first gave rise to them have not lost their force. There has been no change in the grace of God, the efficacy of Christ's blood, the readiness of the Spirit to guide us into the Truth. Christ is still the "Friend of sinners," able to save them unto the uttermost that come unto God by Him. So far from there being good or just reason why we should decline in our love, the very opposite is the case. Our first views of Christ and His Gospel were most inadequate and defective: If we follow on to know the Lord, we shall obtain a better acquaintance with Him, a clearer perception of His perfections, His suitability unto our case, His sufficiency. He should, therefore, be more highly esteemed by us. Said the apostle, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phi 1:9). So far from himself relapsing, as he neared the end of his course, forgetting the things that were behind, he reached forth into those that were before.

To decline in our love is quite unnecessary and to be lamented, but to attempt a vindication of it is highly reprehensible. It would be tantamount to arguing that we were once too spiritually-minded, too tender in conscience, too devoted to God: That we were unduly occupied with Christ and made too much of Him, that we overdid our efforts to please Him. It is also to practically say, we did not find that satisfaction in Christ which we expected, that we obtained not the peace and pleasure in treading Wisdom's ways that we looked for, and therefore, that we were obliged to seek happiness in returning to our former pursuits; and thereby, we confirmed the sneer of our old companions at the outset, that our zeal would soon abate,

and that we should return again to them. Unto such renegades God says, "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me" (Mic 6:3).

The fact remains, however, that many do decline from their first love, though they are seldom aware of it until some of its effects appear. They are like foolish Samson, who had trifled with temptations and displeased the Lord, and who "awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he *wist not* that the LORD was departed from him" (Jdg 16:20). Yielding unto sin blinds the judgment, and we are unconscious that the Spirit is grieved, and that the blessing of God is no longer upon us. Our friends may perceive it and feel concerned on account of the same, but we ourselves are not aware of it. Then it is those solemn words that accurately describe our case: "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he *knoweth not*" (Hos 7:9)! As "gray hairs" are a sign of the decay of our constitution and of approaching decrepitude, so there are some signs which tell of the spiritual decline of a Christian; but usually, he is oblivious to their presence.

We will turn now and point out some of the *symptoms* of spiritual decline. Since sin works so deceitfully and Christians are unconscious of the beginnings of retrogression, it is important that the signs thereof should be described. Once again, we find that the natural adumbrates the spiritual, and if due attention be paid thereto, much that is profitable for the soul may be learned therefrom. Constipation is either due to self-neglect or a faulty diet, and when sin clogs the soul, it is because we have neglected the work of mortification and failed to eat "the bitter herbs" (Exo 12:8). Loss of appetite, paleness of countenance, dullness of eye, absence of energy are so many evidences that all is not well with the body and that we are on the way to a serious illness, unless things soon be righted—and each of those has its spiritual counterpart. Irritability, inability to relax, and loss of sleep are the precursors of a nervous breakdown, and the spiritual equivalents are a call to "Return unto thy *rest*, O my soul" (Psa 116:7).

In cases of leprosy, real or supposed, the Lord gave orders that the individual should be carefully examined, his true state ascertained, and judgment given accordingly. And just so far as a spiritual disease is more odious and dangerous than a physical one, by so much is it necessary for us to form a true judgment concerning it. Every spot is not a leprosy! And every imperfection in a Christian does not indicate he is in a spiritual decline. Even the apostle Paul groaned over his inward corruptions, and confessed he had not yet attained—nor was he already perfect—but pressed forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God (Phi 3:14). Yet those honest admissions were very far from being acknowledgments that he was a backslider, or that he had given way to an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Great care has to be taken on either side, lest on the one hand, we call darkness light and excuse ourselves; or on the other, call light darkness and needlessly write bitter things against ourselves.

Undoubtedly, more are in danger of doing the former than the latter. Yet there *are* Christians—and probably not a few—who wrongly depreciate themselves, draw erroneous conclusions, and suppose their case is worse than it is. For instance, there are those who grieve because they are no longer conscious of that energetic zeal, of those fervent and tender affections, which they were sensible of in the day of their espousals. But a change in their natural constitution, from an increase of years, will account for that. Their animal spirits have waned, their natural energy has diminished, their mental faculties are duller. But though there be less tender and warm feelings, there may be more stability and depth in them. Many things relating to the present world, which in our youth would produce tears, will not have that effect as we mature, though they may lay with greater weight on our spirits. To confuse the absence of the brightness and exuberance of youth with spiritual decline and coldness is a serious mistake.

On the other hand, every departure from God must not be reckoned a mere imperfection, which is common to all the regenerate. Alas, the tendency with writer and reader alike is to flatter himself that *his* "spot" is only "the spot of his [God's] children" (Deu 32:5), or such as the best of Christians are subject to; and therefore to conclude, there is nothing very evil or dangerous about it. Though we may not pretend or deny that we have any faults, yet are we not ready to regard them lightly and say of some sin, as Lot said of Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" (Gen 19:20). Or to exclaim unto one we have wronged, "What have we spoken so much against thee?" (Mal 3:13). But such a self-justifying spirit evidences a most unhealthy state of heart and is to be steadfastly resisted. The apostle Paul spoke of a certain condition of soul, which he feared he should find in the Corinthians: That of having sinned, and yet *not* repented for their deeds; and where *that* be the case, spiritual decay has reached an alarming stage. Here are some of the symptoms of spiritual decline:

1. Waning of our love for Christ. If the Lord Jesus be less precious to our souls than He was formerly, in His person, office, work, grace, and benefits, whatever we may think of ourselves, we have assuredly gone back. If we have a lower esteem of the Lover of our souls, if our delight in Him has decreased, if our meditation upon His perfections be more infrequent, if we commune less with Him, then grace in us has certainly suffered a relapse. It is the nature of certain plants to turn their faces towards the light; and so it is of indwelling grace to strongly incline the heart unto heavenly objects and to take pleasure therein. But if we neglect the means of grace, are not careful to avoid sinful pleasures, or suffer ourselves to be weighted down by the concerns and cares of this life, then will our affections indeed be dampened and our minds rendered vain and carnal. As it is only by acts of faith on the glory of Christ that we are changed into His image (2Co 3:18), so a diminishing of such views of Him will cause our hearts to become chilled and lifeless.

2. Abatement of our zeal for the glory of God. As the principle of grace in the believer causes him to have assurance of Divine mercy to him through the Mediator, so it inspires concern for the Divine honour. As that principle be healthy and vigorous, it will cause us to refuse whatever displeases and dishonours God and His cause, and inspire us to practice those duties with a peculiar pleasure which are most conducive to the glory of God, and which give the clearest evidence of our subjection to the royal scepter of Christ. If the new nature be duly nourished and kept lively, it will influence us to bring forth fruit unto the praise of God; but if that new nature be starved or become sickly, our concern for God's glory will greatly decrease. If we have become less conscientious than formerly of whether our conduct become or bring reproach upon the holy Name we bear, then that is a sure mark of our spiritual decline.

3. Loss of our spiritual appetite. Was there not a time, dear reader, when you could truly say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer 15:16)? If you cannot honestly affirm that today, then you have retrograded. You may indeed be a keener "Bible student" than ever before and spend more time than previously in searching the Scriptures, but that proves nothing to the point. It is not an intellectual interest, but a spiritual relish for the Bread of Life that we are now treating of. Do we really *savour* the things that be of God: The precepts, as well as the promises; the portions that search and wound, as well as comfort? Do we not merely wish to understand its prophecies and mysteries, but really "hunger and thirst after *righteousness*" (Mat 5:6)? If we prefer ashes to the heavenly manna, the "husks" which the swine feed on to the fatted calf—secular literature than sacred—then that is an evident sign of spiritual decline.

4. Sluggishness or drowsiness of mind. One is in a sad frame when exercise before God and communion with Him are supplanted by carnal ease. In spiritual torpor, it is much the same as in the natural: Our senses are no longer exercised to discern good and evil, we neither see nor hear as we ought, nor can we be impressed and affected by spiritual objects as we should be. While in such a condition, spiritual duties are neglected, or at most, performed perfunctorily and mechanically, so that we are none the better for them. If spiritual duties be attended to from custom or conscience rather than from love, they neither honour God nor profit ourselves. Though the outward exercise be gone through, the spirit of it is lacking, the heart is no longer in them. Those who read the Bible or say their prayers as a matter of form or habit perceive no change in themselves; but those who are accustomed to *treat with God* in them, and then discover a disinclination thereto, may know that grace in them has languished. If we have no delight in them, we are in a sad case.

5. Relaxing in our watchfulness against sin. The want of alertness in guarding against all that is evil, under a quick and tender sense of its loathsome nature, is a sure sign of spiritual decline. Refusing to keep our hearts with all diligence, indifference to the working of our corruptions, trifling with temptations without, are certain evidences of the decay of personal holiness. When the new nature is healthy and vigorous, sin is exceedingly sinful to the saint, because he, then, has a clear and forcible apprehension of its malignity and contrariety to God, and that maintains in him a holy indignation against it. While the mind be engaged in considering the awful price which was paid for the remission of our sins, a detestation of evil is stirred up in the heart, and that is attended with strict watchings, for the renewed soul cannot countenance that which was the procuring cause of his Saviour's death. Such an exercise of grace has been obstructed if sin now appears less heinous, and there be less a care in maintaining a watch against it.

6. Attempting to defend our sins. There are some sins which all know are indefensible, but there are others which even professing Christians seek to justify. It is almost surprising to see what ingenuity people will exercise when seeking to find excuses where *self* is concerned. The cunning of the old serpent which

appeared in the excuses of our first parents seems here to supply the place of wisdom. Those possessing little perspicuity in general matters are singularly quick-sighted in discovering every circumstance that appears to make in their favour or serves to extenuate their fault. Sin, when we have committed it, loses its sinfulness, and appears a very different thing from what it did in others. When a sin is committed by *us*, it is common to give it another name—covetousness becomes thrift, malignant contentions fidelity for the Truth, fanaticism zeal for God—and thereby, we become reconciled to it and are ready to enter on a vindication, instead of penitently confessing and forsaking it.

7. Things of the world obtaining control of us. In proportion as the objects of this scene have power to attract our hearts, to that extent is faith inoperative and ineffectual. It is the very nature of faith to occupy us with spiritual, heavenly and eternal objects; and as they become real and precious, our affections are drawn out to them, and the baubles of time and sense lose all value to us. When the soul is communing with God, delighting itself in His ineffable perfections, such trifles—as our dress, the furnishing of our homes, the glittering show made by the rich of this world—make no appeal to us. When the Christian is ravished by the excellency of Christ and the inestimable portion or heritage he has in Him, the pleasures and vanities which charm the ungodly will not only have no allurements, but will pall upon him. It, therefore, follows that when a Christian begins to thirst after the things of time and sense, and evinces a fondness for them, his grace has sadly declined. Those who find satisfaction in anything pertaining to this life have already “forsaken...the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13).

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

We frequently receive letters from readers to say that certain articles which appeared in this magazine “cut them to pieces,” or there was much therein which “condemned them,” or that our correspondents find they are “far from being all they ought to be.” Now, it seems to the editor that this calls upon him to deviate from his general practice of maintaining silence upon his own spiritual experiences, and that honesty requires him to acknowledge that many statements appearing in these pages rebuke and humiliate himself. He was brought up by parents who taught him it was bad manners to talk about himself. In his reading of religious literature, he has come across so much where self was obtruded that he has sought to guard against that objectionable feature. Moreover, it has ever been his supreme aim, either when preaching or writing, to occupy those he ministered unto with God, His Word, and His Christ rather than with himself; and he trusts this will continue to be his prime policy.

The editor is far from wishing to convey the impression that he perfectly practises all he teaches. Alas, such is far from being the case: In “many things” he, too, “offends.” Yet he dare not lower the Standard which God has set before us in His Word and bring it down to his own experience. That Standard is one of sinless perfection, of walking even as Christ also walked (1Jo 2:6). How could the thrice Holy One require anything less? In endeavouring to present that Standard in these pages and urge conformity to it, the writer frequently insists upon that which condemns himself. He is far from keeping his heart with that diligence which he should, from mortifying his lusts as he ought, from following Christ as closely as he would. With the apostle, he has to confess, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Yet by grace, he can also add, “but I follow after, if that I may apprehend [lay hold of] that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:12).

It would indeed be a most deplorable thing if either writer or reader had reached the stage where he was pleased with himself and satisfied with his spiritual progress. As we pointed out in our “Spiritual Growth” articles, the growth of a saint—like that of a tree—is downward as well as upward: That is, he becomes more and more out of love with himself. The more the believer obtains spiritual apprehensions of the perfections of God’s character and the wondrous love of the Mediator, the more conscious is he of what is due the One and the Other, and the more deeply does he feel what a poor return he makes unto Them. But the truly humble person is not the one who *talks* most of his own unworthiness and frequently recounts how such and such an experience abased him into the dust, but it is he who values most highly the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ and makes most frequent use of that Fountain which was opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1).

Novices, who know the least, are most apt to be puffed up. It is always the smatterer who is the most conceited—for he has not sufficient knowledge to perceive his crass ignorance. But as grace increases, so too does light, and the more light we have, the more sensible are we of our numerous and grievous defects. None so confident as young professors, but as they become better acquainted with themselves, they realise the need of praying, “hold thou me up” (Psa 119:117). As grace increases, so does love for God, and that makes us hate sin the more. We have but a gross sense of sin at first, but in God’s light, we see light and are made painfully aware of how much we come short of that purity and holiness which the Divine Law requires, until we are made to cry, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24).

During the last twenty years, we have probably lost many hundreds of readers, just because our endeavour to present the Standard of holiness was so unpopular and unpalatable. The great majority of professing Christians in this evil day wish to hear only “smooth things,” and resent that which searches the conscience, rebukes worldliness, and condemns carnality. They welcome that which ministers to curiosity, which adds to their store of mental knowledge, and which feeds pride; but they disapprove of that which calls for self-examination, reveals failure and exposes a worthless profession. They believe in “Once saved, always saved,” but they are not so ready to believe that God’s salvation is from *sin*—from the love, dominion, and pollution, as well as from the guilt and penalty of it. They relish articles on “the signs of the times,” but are not so eager to peruse one which requires them to look within and make sure they bear the signs or marks of regeneration and sanctification.

But in the mercy of God, there are still a few left on earth who want *the Truth*, no matter how it re-proves and rebukes them; those who had rather be made to groan and shed tears of repentance now, than wail and gnash their teeth for ever in a hopeless eternity. It is for their sakes, we continue publishing, even though not a little of what we write shames ourself. Not that we restrict our pen to that line of things which is calculated to produce conviction and contrition, for we also try to present that which comforts and

evokes praise. Though the “bitter herbs” be enjoined, yet it is the Lamb Himself that the believer is to feed upon. However much we fail in the realisation, it is our earnest endeavour to present a balance between the objective and subjective, the doctrinal and the practical, that which exalts the Lord and that which abases the creature, that which will cause the saint to “rejoice,” yet “with trembling” (Psa 2:11).

The year now drawing to a close has not been our easiest one, nor were we warranted in looking for it to be so. Even though the sword of war be sheathed again, everything is still in a state of chaos and far from normal in any department of life. Christians, as well as non-Christians, feel the pressure of things; and those engaged in business today will not require to be informed that one cannot publish a monthly magazine without encountering difficulties and having his patience sorely tried. Probably none of our readers are without any personal problems, things which irritate, or conditions which are much less congenial than those they formerly enjoyed. The closest walking with God exempts none from tribulation, but it *does* afford strength and peace to which unbelievers are strangers. Though there be given a thorn in the flesh, yet those in communion with the Lord experience the sufficiency of His grace; and while He may not grant immunity from trouble, yet if His smile be upon us, He will show Himself strong on our behalf.

Signally has the Lord undertaken for us in the matter of a reliable and generous printer, both in the U.S.A., in Australia, and in England. Our circulation has always been a very limited one (much smaller than most religious periodicals), and for that reason, did not present an attractive business proposition—too trivial for most printers to want to “bother with,” for there would be scarcely any profit. By far, the most expensive item is not the cost of paper, but the setting up of the type, and it costs no more to set the type for ten thousand copies than for one. In pre-war years, we had an arrangement which made our job more desirable to the printers, enabling them to make such for us at a much lower price: We sent them the manuscript seven or eight weeks early, so that when the compositors had a slack time, between more remunerative jobs, ours could be worked in at their convenience. But now that labour is so scarce, there are no longer any slack periods. They have continued to make it available for us at an exceptionally low rate; but today, it *costs us double* as much to publish a single issue as it did six years ago.

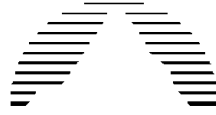
Yet though expenses have increased, so also have our receipts—as the Lord has graciously been moving His stewards to give more freely. This has enabled us to send the magazine to many who contributed less than the bare cost of it to us, and also to mail it gratis to others. Let us say once more these “Studies” are gladly sent to any of the Lord’s people who find its articles are made a blessing to them—whether they make us a donation for one pound, enclose only [some] stamps, or are unable to send more than a post-card expressing their appreciation. We had rather send to the genuinely “poor of the flock” and have their daily prayers, than to Laodiceans who forward £5. We ask no one to increase his or her subscription, for there is *no* “subscription” for this magazine: It is published solely on a free-will-offering basis; and the widow’s “mite” is just as acceptable as “the much” cast in by the rich. What we most covet is your remembrance of us at the Throne, and God’s blessing the articles to your souls so that you enjoy a closer communion with Him. Let none ask us to drop their names, because they are unable to send what they would like to.¹

Our articles upon “Spiritual Growth” have already exceeded the number we originally expected. As we proceeded, the subject grew; but we hope to complete the series during 1946, as also those upon “Reconciliation.” For awhile at least, those upon Joshua are likely to be more of a topical than strictly expository character. We expect to continue (D.V.) those upon the “Prayers of the Apostles.” Members of the one flock are found in many different ecclesiastical folds, and some are accustomed to hearing one side of the Truth emphasized much more than another. In seeking to minister unto the needs of such varied cases, wisdom from above is sorely needed, and sometimes we have to ask one part of our readers to patiently bear with us, while we try to help another class whose particular need is quite different from theirs. When sitting down to a table, one does not eat all that is upon it, but selects that which most appeals to him; do likewise with the fare provided here, and remember, “tastes differ.”

... We are happy to say that our circulation has again registered a slight, but steady, increase... We shall need at least 100 new readers for 1946 to replace those dropped from this year! Please do all you can to make the “Studies” known to fellow believers. Once more, we close with a credit balance: Will kind friends please *refrain* from sending any gifts for our *own* use, as our personal needs are fully provided for. By the goodness of God, we have again been preserved from any illness. Beg the Lord to make this work a blessing to a larger number of His own.

¹ [As Chapel Library republishes the original issues, we follow the policy of sending all subscriptions (in North America) without charge. In addition, all printed issues are posted on our website for worldwide download without charge. We appreciate donations by faith as the Lord leads, as they allow us to continue this ministry, but they are never solicited.]

With hearty Christian greetings, Yours by Divine Mercy,
—A.W. and V.E. Pink



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