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The Covenant Offices of the Spirit

The ground which we are now to tread, will, we fear, be new and strange to most of our readers. In the January and February 1930 issues of this magazine, we wrote two rather lengthy articles upon "The Everlasting Covenant." There we dwelt principally upon it in connection with the Father and Son; here we shall contemplate the relation of the Holy Spirit unto the same. His covenant-offices are intimately connected with and indeed flow from His Deity and Personality (which we have already considered in the preceding papers of this series), for if He had not been a Divine Person in the Godhead, He would not and could not have taken a part in the Covenant of Grace. Before proceeding further, let us define our terms.

By the "Covenant of Grace," we refer to that holy and solemn compact entered into between the august Persons of the Trinity on behalf of the elect, before the foundation of the world. By the word "offices" we understand the whole of that part of this sacred compact which the Holy Spirit undertook to perform. Lest some should suppose that the application of such a term to the third Person of the Godhead be derogatory to His ineffable majesty, let us point out that it by no means implies subordination or inferiority. It signifies literally a particular charge, trust, duty, or employment, conferred for some public or beneficial end. Hence we read of "the priest's office" (Exo. 28:1; Luke 1:8), the Apostolic "office" (Rom. 11:13), etc.

There is then no impropriety in using the word "office" to express the several parts which the Son and the blessed Spirit undertook in the Covenant of Grace. As Persons in the Trinity they were equal; as covenanting Parties they were equal; and as They in infinite condescension, undertook to communicate to the Church unutterable favours and blessings, Their kind offices, so graciously and voluntarily entered into, neither destroy nor diminish that original equality in which They from all eternity subsisted in the perfection and glory of the Divine Essence. As Christ's susception of the "office" of "Servant" in nowise tarnished or canceled His equality as the "Son," so the Spirit's free undertaking the office of *applying* the benefits of The Everlasting Covenant to its beneficiaries, in nowise detracts from His essential and personal honour and glory.

The word "office," then, as applied to the covenant-work of the Holy Spirit, denotes that which He graciously undertook to perform by way of stipulated engagement and sets forth, under one comprehensive term, the whole of His blessed pledgings and performances on behalf of the election of grace. To an enlightened understanding and a believing heart, there is in the Covenant itself—in the fact of it, and the provisions of it—something singularly marvelous and precious. That there should have been a Covenant at all; that the three Persons in the Godhead should have deigned to enter into a solemn compact on behalf of a section of the fallen, ruined, and guilty race of mankind, should fill our minds with holy wonderment and adoration. But how firm a foundation was thus laid for the salvation of the Church. No room was allowed for contingencies, no place left for uncertainties; her being and well-being was forever secured by unalterable compact and eternal decree.

Now the "Office-work" of the Holy Spirit in connection with this "Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5), may be summed up in a single word, *sanctification*. The third Person of the Holy Trinity agreed to sanctify the objects of the

Father's eternal choice, and of the Son's redemptive satisfaction. The Spirit's work of sanctification was just as needful, yea, as indispensable for the Church's salvation, as was the obedience and blood-shedding of Christ. Adam's Fall plunged the Church into immeasurable depths of woe and wretchedness. The image of God in which her members had been created, was defaced. Sin, like a loathsome leprosy, infected them to the very heart's core. Satan tyrannizing over her, dragging her without help or hope towards the brink of the bottomless pit. Spiritual death spreading itself with fatal effect over her every faculty. But the gracious Holy Spirit pledged Himself to sanctify such wretches, and frame and fit them to be partakers of holiness, and live forever in God's spotless presence.

Without the Spirit's sanctification the redemption of Christ would avail no man. True, a perfect atonement was made by Him and a perfect righteousness brought in, and so the persons of the elect are legally reconciled to God. But Jehovah is holy as well as just, and the employments and enjoyment of His dwelling place are holy too. Holy angels there minister, whose unceasing cry is "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). How then could unholy, unregenerate, unsanctified sinners dwell in that ineffable place into which "there shall in nowise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (Rev. 21:27)? But O the wonder of covenant grace and covenant love! The vilest of sinners, the worst of wretches, the basest of mortals, can and will enter through the gates into the Holy City: "And such *were* some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and *by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor. 6:11).

From what has been said in the last paragraph, it should be clear that sanctification is as indispensable as justification. Now there are many phases presented in Scripture of this important truth of sanctification, into which we cannot here enter. Suffice it to say that that aspect of it which is now before us is the blessed work of the Spirit upon the soul, whereby He internally makes the saints meet for their inheritance in the light (Col. 1:12): without this miracle of grace none can enter Heaven. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6): no matter how it be educated and refined, no matter how disguised by religious ornamentation, it remains flesh still. It is like everything else which earth produces: no manipulation of art can change the original nature of the raw material.

No process of manufacture can transmute cotton into wool, or flax into silk: draw, twist, spin or weave, bleach and surface all we may, its nature remains the same. So men-made preachers and the whole corps of creature religionists may toil night and day, to change flesh into spirit, they may work from the cradle to the grave to fit people for Heaven, but after all their labours to wash the Ethiopian white and to rub the spots out of the leopard, flesh is flesh still, and cannot by any possibility enter the kingdom of God. Nothing but the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit will avail. Not only is man polluted to the very core by sin original and actual, but there is in him an absolute incapability to understand, embrace or enjoy spiritual things: 1 Corinthians 2:14.

The imperative necessity, then, of the Spirit's work of sanctification lies not only in the sinfulness of man, but in the state of spiritual death whereby he is as unable to live, breathe, and act Godward as the corpse in the graveyard is unable to leave the silent tomb and move among the busy haunts of men. We indeed know little of the Word of God and little of our own hearts if we need proof of a fact which meets us at every turn; the vile-ness of our nature, the thorough deathliness of our carnal heart are so daily and hourly

forced upon us, that they are as much a matter of painful consciousness to the Christian, as if we should see the sickening sight of a slaughterhouse, or smell the death taint of a corpse.

Suppose a man is born blind: he has a natural incapacity of sight. No arguments, bid- dings, threats, or promises can make him see. But let a miracle be wrought: let the Lord touch the eyes with His Divine hand; he sees at once. Though he cannot explain how or why, he can say to all objectors “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). And thus it is in the Spirit’s work of sanctification, begun at regeneration, when a new life is given, a new capacity imparted, a new desire awakened. It is carried forward in His daily renewings (2 Cor. 4;16), and is completed at glorification. What we would specially emphasize is that whether the Spirit be convicting us, working repen- tance in us, breathing upon us the spirit of prayer, or taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto our joyful hearts, He is discharging His covenant offices. May we render unto Him the praise and worship which is His due. A.W.P.

N.B. For most of the above we are indebted to some articles by the late J.C. Philpot.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

65. *The Faith of Abraham: Hebrews 11:17-19.*

This chapter is the chronology of faith, or a record of some of the outstanding acts which that grace has produced in all ages. The Apostle having mentioned the works wrought by the faith of those who lived before the Flood (vv. 4-7), and having spoken of the patriarchs in general (vv. 9-16), now mentions them in detail. He begins again with that of Abraham, who in this glorious constellation shines forth as a star of the first magnitude, and therefore is fittingly styled the father of the faithful. Three principal products of his faith are here singled out: his leaving the land of his birth, upon the call of God (v.8); the manner of his life in Canaan, sojourning in tents (v. 9); and his offering up of Isaac. The first pictures conversion, the second the Christian's life in this world, the third the triumphant consummation of faith.

Among all the actings of Abraham's faith nothing was more remarkable and noteworthy than the offering up of his son Isaac. Not only was it the most wonderful work of faith ever wrought, and therefore is the most illustrious of all examples for us to follow (the life and death of Christ alone excepted), but it also supplies the most blessed shadowing out of the love of God the Father in the gift of His dear Son. The resemblances pointed by the type are numerous and striking. Abraham offered up a son, his only begotten son. Abraham delivered up his son to a sacrificial death, and, in purpose, smote him. But observe too how the antitype excelled the type. Abraham's son was only a man. Abraham offered up Isaac under Divine command: God was under no constraint, but gave Christ freely. Abraham's son suffered not: Christ did.

Let it not be forgotten that the chief design before the Apostle throughout this chapter, was to demonstrate unto his tried brethren the great efficacy of faith: its power to sustain a very great trial, to perform a very difficult duty, and to obtain a very important blessing. Unmistakably were these three things illustrated in the case we are now to consider. As we have already seen, it was not without good reason that Abraham is designated the father of all who believe. But among all the actings of his faith none was more memorable than its exercise upon Mount Moriah. If we consider the object of it, the occasion of it, the hindrances which stood in his way, and his blessed victory, we cannot but admire and wonder at the power of Divine grace triumphing over the weakness of the flesh.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (v. 17). For a clearer understanding of this verse we need to consult Genesis 22: there we read, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (vv. 1, 2). The whole of what follows in Genesis 22, to the end of verse 19, should be carefully read. Before attempting to expound our present verse and make application to ourselves of its practical teachings, let us seek to remove one or two difficulties which may stand in the way of the thoughtful reader.

First, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” The word “offered up” is the same that is used for slaying and offering up sacrifices. Here then is the problem: how could Abraham “offer up” his son *by faith*, seeing that it was against both the law of nature and the law of God for a man to slay his own son? Genesis 22:2, however, shows that his faith had a sure foundation to rest upon, for the Lord Himself had commanded

him so to do. But this only appears to remove the difficulty one stage farther back: God Himself had laid it down as a law that “whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6). True, but though His creatures are bound by the laws He has prescribed them, God Himself is not.

God is under no law, but is absolute Sovereign. Moreover, He is the Lord of life, both Giver and Preserver of it, and therefore has He an indisputable right to dispose of it, to take it away when He pleases, by what means or instruments He sees fit. God possesses supreme authority, and when He pleases sets aside His own laws, or issues new ones contrary to those given previously. By His own imperial fiat, Jehovah now, by special and extraordinary command, constituted it a duty for Abraham to do what before had been a sin. In similar manner, He who gave commandment “thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness” (Exo. 20:4), ordered Moses *to make* a brazen serpent (Num. 21:8)! Learn, then, that God is bound by no law, being above all law.

Second, but how could it be truly said that Abraham “offered up Isaac,” seeing that he did not actually slay him? In regard to his willingness, in regard to his set purpose, and in regard to God’s acceptance of the will for the deed, he *did* do so. There was no reserve in his heart, and there was no failure in his honest endeavors. He took the three days’ journey to the appointed place of sacrifice; he bound Isaac unto the altar, and took the knife into his hand to slay him. And God accepted the will for the deed. This exemplifies a most important principle in connection with God’s acceptance of the Christian’s obedience. The terms of His law have not been lowered: God still requires of us personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience. But this we are unable to render to Him while in our present state. And so, for Christ’s sake, where the heart (at which God ever looks) *truly desires* to fully please Him in all things, and makes an honest and *sincere effort* to do so, God graciously accepts the will for the deed. Carefully ponder 2 Corinthians 8:12 which illustrates the same blessed fact, and note the word “willing” in Hebrews 13:18!

Third, the statement made in Genesis 22:1, “God did tempt Abraham,” or as our text says, “when he was tried,” for that is exactly what both the original Hebrew and Greek word signifies: to make trial of. “It is an act of God whereby He proveth and makes experience of the loyalty and obedience of His servants” (W. Perkins). And this *not* for His own information (for He “knoweth our thoughts afar off”), but for their own knowledge and that of their fellows. Christ put the rich young ruler to the proof when He said, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21). So too He made trial of the Canaanite woman when He said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs” (Matt. 15:26).

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” In order to understand and appreciate the fact that it was “by *faith*” Abraham offered up Isaac, we must examine more closely the nature of that test to which the Lord submitted the one whom He condescended to call His “friend.” In bidding him to sacrifice his beloved son, that ordeal combined in it various and distinct features: it was a testing of his submission or loyalty to God; it was a testing of his affections, as to whom he really loved the more: God or Isaac; it was a testing of which was the stronger within him: grace or sin; but supremely, it was a testing of his *faith*.

Carnal writers see in this incident little more than a severe trial of Abraham’s natural affections. It cannot be otherwise, for water never rises above its own level; and carnal men are incapable of discerning spiritual things. But it is to be carefully noted that He-

brews 11:17 does not say, “In submission to God’s holy will, Abraham offered up Isaac,” though that was true; nor “out of supreme love for God he offered his son,” though that was also the case. Instead, the Holy Spirit declares that it was “by faith” that the patriarch acted declaring “he that had *received the promises* offered up his only begotten son.” Most of the modern commentators, filled with fleshly sentiment rather than with the Holy Spirit, completely miss this point, which is the central beauty of our verse. Let us seek then to attend unto it the more particularly.

In calling upon Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering, the Lord submitted his faith to a fiery ordeal. How so? Because God’s promises to Abraham concerning his “seed” centered in Isaac, and in bidding him slay his only son, He appeared to contradict Himself. Ishmael had been cast out, and Isaac’s posterity alone was to be reckoned to Abraham as the blessed seed among whom God would have His church. Isaac had been given to Abraham after he had long gone childless and when Sarah’s womb was dead, therefore there was no likelihood of his having any more sons by her. At the time, Isaac himself was childless, and to kill him looked like cutting off all his hopes. How then could Abraham reconcile the Divine command with the Divine promise? To sacrifice his son and heir was not only contrary to his natural affections, but opposed to carnal reason as well.

In like manner God tests the faith of His people today. He calls upon them to perform acts of obedience which are contrary to their natural affections and which are opposed to carnal reason. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). How many a Christian has had his or her affections drawn out toward a non-Christian, and then has come to them that piercing word, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14)! How many a child of God has had his membership in a “church” where he saw that Christ was dishonoured; to heed that Divine command, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17) entailed leaving behind those near and dear in the flesh; but the call of God could not be disregarded, no matter how painful obedience to it might be.

But when are we put to such a trial as to offer up our Isaac? To this question the Puritan Manton returned a threefold answer. First, in the case of *submission* to the strokes of providence, when near relations are taken away from us. God knows how to strike us in the right vein; there will be the greatest trial where our love is set. Second, in case of *self-denial*, forsaking our choicest interests for a good conscience. We must not only part with mean things, but such as we prize above anything in the world. When God requires it (as He did with the writer) that we should forsake father and mother, we must not demur; nay, our lives should not be dear unto us (Acts 20:24). Third, in *mortifying* our bosom lust: this is what is signified by cutting off a “right hand” or plucking out a “right eye” (Matt. 5:29, 30).

Let us notice the *time* when Abraham was thus tested. The Holy Spirit has emphasized this in Genesis 22:1 by saying, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.” A double reference seems to be made in these words. First, a general one to all the preceding trials which Abraham had endured—his journey to Canaan, his sojourning there in tents, the long, long wait for the promised heir. Now that he had passed through a great fight of afflictions, he is called upon to suffer a yet severer test. Ah, God educates His children little by little: as they grow in grace harder tasks are assigned them, and deeper waters are called upon to be passed through, that enlarged op-

portunities may be afforded for manifesting their increased faith in God. It is not the raw recruit, but the scarred veteran, who is assigned a place in the front ranks in the battle. Think it not strange then fellow-Christian if thy God is now appointing thee severer tests than He did some years ago.

Second, a more specific reference is made in Genesis 22:1 to what is recorded in the previous chapter: the miraculous birth of Isaac, the great feast that Abraham made, when he was weaned (v. 8), and the casting out of Ishmael (v. 14). The cup of the patriarch's joy was now full. His outlook seemed most promising: not a cloud appeared on the horizon. Yet it was then, like a heavy clap of thunder out of a clear sky, that the most trying test of all came upon him! Yes, and so it was just after God had pronounced Job "a perfect man and an upright" that He delivered all that he had into Satan's hands (Job 1:8, 12). So too it was when Paul had been rapt to the third Heaven, when he received such "abundance of revelations," that there was given him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him" (2 Cor. 12:1-7).

How we need to seek grace that we may be enabled to hold every thing down here with a light hand. Rightly did an old writer say, "Build not thy nest on any earthly tree, for the whole forest is doomed to be cut down." It is not only for God's glory, but for our own good, that we set our affections upon "things above." And in view of what has just been before us, how necessary it is that we should *expect* and seek in advance to be prepared for severe trials. Are we not bidden to "hear for the time to come" (Isa. 42:23)? The more we calmly anticipate future trials, the less likely are we to be staggered and overcome by them when they arrive: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12).

Having observed the time when Abraham was tested, let us now consider the *severity* of his trial. And first *the act* itself. Abraham was ordered to slay, not all his bullocks and herds, but a human being; and that not one of his faithful servants, but his beloved son. Abraham was bidden not to banish him from home or send him out of Canaan, but, to cut him off out of the land of the living. He was commanded to do a thing for which no reason could be assigned save the authority of Him who gave the command. He was bidden to do that which was most abhorrent to natural feeling. He must not only consent unto the death of his dear Isaac, but himself be his executioner. He was to slay one who was guilty of no crime, but who (according to the Divine record) was an unusually dutiful, loving, and obedient child. Was ever such a demand made upon a human creature before or since!

Second, consider *the offerer*. In our text he is presented in a particular character: "he that had received the promises," which is the key clause to the verse. God had declared unto Abraham that He would establish an everlasting covenant with Isaac and with his seed after him (Gen. 17:9). Isaac, and none other, was the "seed" by whose posterity Canaan should be possessed (Gen. 12:7). It was through him that all nations should be blessed (Gen. 17:7), and therefore it must be through him that Christ, according to the flesh, would proceed. These promises Abraham had "received": he had given credit for them, firmly believed them, fully expected their performance. Now the accomplishment of those promises depended upon the preservation of Isaac's life—at least until he had a son; and to sacrifice him now, appeared to render them all null and void, making their fulfillment impossible.

"He that had received the promises"—"which noteth not only the revelation of the

promises, concerning a numerous issue, and the Messiah to come of his loins, but the entertaining of them and cordial assent to them. He received them not only as a private believer, but as a free offer in trust for the use of the church. In the first ages of the world God had some eminent persons who received a revelation of His will in the name of the rest. This was Abraham's case, and he is here viewed not only as a father, a loving father, but as one who had received the promises as a public person, and father of the faithful—the person whom God had chosen in whom to deposit the promises” (T. Manton). Herein lay the *spiritual* acuteness of the trial: would he not in slaying Isaac be faithless to his trust? would he not by his own act place the gravestone on all hope for the fulfillment of such promises?

Forcibly did Matthew Henry, when commenting upon the time at which Abraham received this trying command from God, say, “After he had received the promises that this Isaac should build up his family, and that ‘in him his seed should be called’ (Heb. 11:18), and that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah, and all nations blessed in Him; so that in being called to offer up his Isaac, he seemed to be called to destroy and cut off his own family, to cancel the promises of God, to prevent the coming of Christ, to destroy the whole truth, to sacrifice his own soul and his hope of salvation, to cut off the church of God at one blow; a most terrible trial!” If Isaac were slain, then *all* seemed to be lost.

It may be asked, But *why* should God thus try the faith of the patriarch? For Abraham's own sake that he might the better know the efficacy of that grace which God had bestowed upon him. As the suspending of a heavy weight upon a chain reveals either its weakness or its strength, so God places His people in varied circumstances which manifest the state of their hearts—whether or no their trust be really in Him. The Lord tried Hezekiah to show unto him his frailty (2 Chron. 32:31); he tried Job to show that though He slew him yet would he trust in God. Second, for the sake of others, that Abraham might be an example to them. God had called him to be the father of the faithful, and therefore would He show unto all generations of his children what grace He had conferred upon him—what a worthy “father” or pattern he was (condensed from W. Gouge).

In like manner, God tries His people today and puts to the proof the grace which He has communicated to their hearts: this, both for His own glory, and for their own comfort. The Lord is determined to make it manifest that He has on earth a people who will forsake any comfort and endure any misery rather than forego their plain duty; who love Him better than their own lives, and who are prepared to trust Him in the dark. So too we are the gainers, for we never have clearer proof of the reality of grace than when we are under sore trials. “Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3, 4). As another has said, “By knocking upon the vessel we see whether it is full or empty, cracked or sound; so by these knocks of providence we are discovered.”

Rightly did John Owen point out, “Trials are the only touchstone of faith, without which men must want (lack) the best evidence of its sincerity and efficacy, and the best way of testifying it unto others. Wherefore we ought not to be afraid of trials, because of the admirable advantages of faith, in and by them.” Yea, the Word of God goes farther, and bids us, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” or “trials,” declaring “that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). So too, “Though now

for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (or “trials”) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6, 7.).

In conclusion, let us observe how Abraham conducted himself under this sore trial: “he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.” Many instructive details concerning this are recorded in Genesis 22. There it will be found that Abraham consulted not with Sarah—why should he, when he already *knew* God’s will on the matter! Nor was there any disputing with God, as to the apparently flagrant discrepancy between His present command and His previous promises. Nor was there any delay: “And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Gen. 22:3). And how is his unparalleled action to be accounted for? From what super-fleshly principle did it spring? A single word gives the answer: FAITH. Not a theoretical faith, not a mere head-knowledge of God, but a real, living, spiritual, triumphant, *faith*.

“*By faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” By faith in the Divine justice and wisdom behind the command so to act. By faith in the veracity and faithfulness of God to make good His own promises. Fully assured that God was able to fulfill His word, Abraham closed his eyes to all difficulties, and steadfastly counted upon the power of Him that cannot lie. This is the very nature or character of a *spiritual* faith: it persuades the soul of God’s absolute supremacy, unerring wisdom, unchanging righteousness, infinite love, almighty power. In other words, it rests upon the *character* of the living God, and trusts Him in the face of every obstacle. Spiritual faith makes its favoured possessor judge that the greatest suffering is better than the least sin; yea, it unhesitatingly avows “Thy loving kindness is better than life” (Psa. 63:3).

We must leave for our next article the consideration of the remainder of our passage. But in view of what has already been before us, is not both writer and reader constrained to cry unto God, “Lord, have mercy upon me! Pardon my vile unbelief, and graciously subdue its awful power. Be pleased, for Christ’s sake, to work in me that spiritual and supernatural faith which will honour Thee and bear fruits to Thy glory. And if Thou hast, in Thy discriminating grace, already communicated to me this precious, precious gift, then graciously deign to strengthen it by the power of Thy Holy Spirit; call it forth into more frequent exercise and action. Amen.” A.W.P.

We trust that all American readers are praying daily for the President and his Cabinet: see 1 Timothy 2:2.

The Life of David

17. *His Affront from Nabal.*

The incident which is now to engage our attention may seem, at first sight, to contain in it little of practical importance for our hearts. If so, we may be sure that our vision is dim. There is nothing trivial in Holy Writ. Everything which the Spirit has recorded therein has a voice for us, if only we will seek the hearing ear. Whenever we read a portion of God's Word, and find therein little suited to our own case and need, we ought to be humbled: the fault is in us. This should at once be acknowledged unto God, and a spiritual quickening of soul sought from Him. There should be a definite asking Him to graciously anoint our eyes (Rev. 3:18), not only that we may be enabled to behold wondrous things in His Law, but also that He will make us of quick discernment to perceive how the passage before us applies to ourselves

It is the *practical* lessons to be learned from each section that all of us are in so much need of, and this is uppermost in our minds in the composing of this present series of articles. What, then, is there here for us to take to heart? David, in his continued wanderings, applies to a well-to-do farmer for some rations for his men. The appeal was suitably timed, courteously worded, and based upon a weighty consideration. The request was presented not to a heathen, but to an Israelite, to a member of his own tribe, to a descendant of Caleb; in short, to one from whom he might reasonably expect a favourable response. Instead, he met with a rude rebuff, and a provoking insult. Obviously, there is a *warning* here for us in the despicable meanness of Nabal, which must be turned into prayer for Divine grace to preserve us from being inhospitable and unkind to God's servants.

But it is with David that we are chiefly concerned. In our last three lessons we have seen him conducting himself with becoming mildness and magnanimity, showing mercy unto the chief of his enemies. There we saw him resisting a sore temptation to take matters into his own hands, and make an end of his troubles by slaying the chief of his persecutors, when he was thoroughly in his power. But here our hero is seen in a very different light. He meets with another trial, a trial of a much milder nature, yet instead of overcoming evil with good, he was in imminent danger of being overcome with evil. Instead of exercising grace, he is moved with a spirit of revenge; instead of conducting himself so that the praises of God are "*shown forth*" (1 Peter 2:9), only the works of the flesh are seen. Alas, how quickly had the fine gold become dim! And how are we to account for this? and what are the lessons to be learned from it?

Is the reader surprised as he turns from the blessed picture presented in the second half of 1 Samuel 24 and ponders the almost sordid actions of David in the very next chapter? Is he puzzled to account for the marked lapse in the conduct of him who had acted so splendidly toward Saul? Is he at a loss to explain David's spiteful attitude toward Nabal? If so, he must be woefully ignorant of *his own* heart, and has yet to learn a most important lesson: that no man stands a moment longer than Divine grace upholds him. The strongest are weak as water immediately the power of the Spirit is withdrawn; the most mature and experienced Christian acts foolishly the moment he be left to himself; none of us has any reserve strength or wisdom in himself to draw from: our source of sufficiency is *all* treasured up for us in Christ, and as soon as communion with Him be broken, as soon as we cease looking alone to Him for help, we are helpless.

What has just been stated above is acknowledged as true by God's people in general,

yet many of their thoughts and conclusions are glaringly inconsistent therewith—or why be so surprised when they hear of some eminent saint experiencing a sad fall! The “eminent saint” is not the one who has learned to walk alone, but he who most feels his need of leaning harder upon the “everlasting arms.” The “eminent saint” is not the one who is no longer tempted by the lusts of the flesh and harassed by the assaults of Satan, but he who knows that in the flesh there dwelleth no good thing, and that only *from Christ* can his “fruit” be found (Hosea 14:8). Looked at in themselves, the “fathers” in Christ are just as frail and feeble as the “babes” in Christ. Left to themselves, the wisest Christians have no better judgment than has the new convert. Whether God is pleased to leave us upon earth another year or another hundred years, all will constantly need to observe that word “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41)

And God has many ways of teaching us the “weakness” of the flesh. One of these receives striking illustration in the incident to be before us, and which has no doubt been painfully realized in the experience of each Christian reader: that in some great crisis we have been enabled to stand our ground, strong in faith, whereas before some petty trial we have broken down and acted as a man of the world would act. It is thus that God stains our pride, subdues our self-sufficiency, and brings us to the place of more real and constant dependence upon Himself. The “little foxes” (Song. 2:15) spoil the vines, and it is our reaction unto the lesser irritations of everyday life which most reveal us to ourselves—humbling us through our failures, and fitting us to bear with more patience the infirmities of our brethren and sisters in Christ.

Who would have thought that he who had taken so meekly the attacks of the king upon his life, should have waxed so furious when a farmer refused a little food for his men! Rightly did Thomas Scott point out, “David had been on his guard against anger and revenge when most badly used by Saul, but he did not expect such reproachful language and insolent treatment from Nabal: he was therefore wholly put off his guard; and in great indignation he determined to avenge himself.” Lay this well to heart dear reader: a small temptation is likely to prevail after a greater has been resisted. Why so? Because we are less conscious of our need of God’s delivering grace. Peter was bold before the soldiers in the Garden, but became fearful in the presence of a maid. But it is time for us to consider some of the details of our passage.

“And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah” (1 Sam. 25:1). How often will people sorrow outwardly for one when dead to whom they did not care to listen when living. There had been a time when Samuel was appreciated by Israel, particularly when they were feeling the pressure of the Philistine yoke; but more recently he has been despised (1 Sam. 8). They had preferred a king to the prophet, but now Saul was proving such a disappointment, and the breach between the king and David showed no signs of being healed, they lamented the removal of Samuel.

“And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran” (25:1). David too was despised by the greater part of the nation. Once he had been the hero of their songs, but now he was homeless, outlawed, and few cared to own him. Learning of Samuel’s death, he probably thought that his danger was greater than ever, for the prophet was more than friendly disposed toward him. He no doubt concluded that Saul’s malice would be now more unrestrained than ever. Taking advantage of “all the Israelites” being gathered to-

gether, to mourn the death of Samuel, he left Engedi to sojourn for a while in other parts. But let us note well the ominous hint given in the words “and *went down* to the wilderness of Paran.”

We have next presented to our notice the one to whom David made his appeal (1 Sam. 25:2, 3). From the character given to him by the Holy Spirit, not much good might be expected from him. His name was “Nabal” which signifies “a fool,” and none is a greater fool than he who thinks only of number one. He was a descendant of Caleb, which is mentioned here as an aggravation of his wickedness: that he should be the degenerate plant of so noble a vine. We are told that this man was “very great”: not in piety, but in material possessions, for he had very large flocks of sheep and goats. His wife was of a beautiful countenance “and of good understanding,” but her father could not have been so, or he would not have sacrificed her to a man who had nothing better to recommend him than earthly wealth. Poor woman! she was tied to one who was “churlish and evil in his doings”: greedy and grasping, sour and cross-tempered.

“And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name” (vv. 4, 5). The season for shearing the sheep was a notable one, for wool was a leading commodity in Canaan. With such a very large flock, a considerable number of extra hands would have to be hired by Nabal, and a plentiful supply of provisions prepared. From 2 Samuel 13:23 it appears that it was the custom in those days to combine feasting and merriment with the shearing: compare also Genesis 38:13. It was a time when men were generally disposed to be hospitable and kind. As to how far David was justified in appealing to man, rather than spreading his need before God alone, we undertake not to decide—it is certainly not safe to draw any inference from the sequel.

“And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David” (vv. 6-8). The request to be presented before Nabal was one which the world would call respectful and tactful. The salutation of peace bespoke David’s friendly spirit. Reminder was given that, in the past, David had not only restrained his men from molesting Nabal’s flocks, but had also protected them from the depredation of invaders—compare verses 14-17. He might then have asked for a reward for his services, but instead he only supplicates a favour. Surely Nabal would not refuse his men a few victuals, for it was “a good day,” a time when there was plenty to hand. Finally David takes the place of a “son,” hoping to receive some fatherly kindness from him.

But as we examine this address more closely, we note the low ground which was taken: there was nothing spiritual in it! Moreover, we fully agree with Matthew Henry’s comments on the opening words of verse 6. “Thus shall ye say to him that liveth,” “as if those lived indeed, that lived as Nabal did, with abundance of the wealth of this world about them; whereas, in truth, those that live in pleasure are dead while they live (1 Tim. 5:6). This was, methinks, too high a compliment to pass upon Nabal, to call him the man that liveth: David knew better things—that ‘in God’s favour is life’, not in the world’s

smiles; and, by the rough answer, he was well enough served for this too smooth address to such a muck worm.”

“And when David’s young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased” (1 Sam. 25:9). This verse serves to illustrate another important principle: not only are God’s children more or less *revealed* by their reaction to and conduct under the varied experiences they encounter, but the presence of God’s servants *test* the character of those with whom they come into contact. It was so here. A golden opportunity was afforded Nabal of showing kindness to the Lord’s “anointed,” but he seized it not. Alas, how many there are who know not the day of their visitation. Nabal had no heart for David, and clearly was this now made manifest. So too the selfishness and carnality of professors frequently become apparent by their failures to befriend the servants of God, when chances to do so are brought right to their door. It is a grand and holy privilege when the Lord sends one of His prophets into your neighbourhood, yet it may issue in a fearfully solemn sequel.

“And Nabal answered David’s servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?” (vv. 10, 11). What an insulting answer to return unto so mild a request! To justify a refusal he stooped to heaping insults on the head of David. It was not a total stranger who had applied to him, for Nabal’s calling him “the son of Jesse” showed he knew well who he was; but, absorbed with schemes of selfish acquisition he cared not for him. Let it be duly noted that in acting in such a heartless manner Nabal clearly disobeyed Deuteronomy 15:7-11. Nabal’s repeated use of the word “my” in verse 11 reminds us of the other rich “fool” in Luke 12:18-20.

“So David’s young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings (v. 12). Highly commendable was their conduct. “Young men” are often hot-blooded and hot-headed, and act impetuously and rashly; but they admirably restrained themselves. The language of Nabal had been highly offensive, but instead of returning railing for railing, they treated him with silent contempt and turned their backs upon him: such churls are not entitled to any reply. It is blessed to see they did not use force, and attempt to take what ought to have been freely given to them. Never are the children of God justified in so doing: we must ever seek grace to maintain a good conscience, “in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb. 13:18). Oft times the best way for overcoming a temptation to make a wrathful reply, is to quietly turn away from those who have angered us.

“And came and told him all those sayings.” Here we are shown how the servants of Christ are to act when abused. Instead of indulging the spirit of revenge, they are to go and spread their case before their Master (Luke 14:21). It was thus the perfect Servant acted: of Him it is written, “Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). Oft times God brings us into trying situations to reveal unto us whether we are “acknowledging Him in *all* our ways” (Prov. 3:6), or whether there is still a measure of self-sufficiency at work in our hearts—our response to the trial makes manifest which be the case.

And what was David’s response? How did *he* now react unto the disappointing tidings brought back by his men? Did he, as the *servant* of God meekly bear Nabal’s taunts and

cutting reproach? Did he cast his burden on the Lord, looking to Him for sustaining grace (Psa. 55:22)? Alas, he acted in the energy of the flesh. “And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; And David also girded on his sword” (v. 13). David neither betook himself to prayer nor reflected upon the matter, but hurriedly prepared to avenge the insult he had received.

True, the ingratitude which Nabal had shown, and the provoking language he had used, were hard to endure—too hard for mere flesh and blood, for human nature ever wants to vindicate itself. His only recourse lay in God: to see *His* hand in the trial, and to seek grace to bear it. But momentarily David forgot that he had committed his cause unto the Lord, and took matters into his own hands. And why did God permit this breakdown? That no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Cor. 1:29). “This must be the reason why suchlike episodes are found in the lives of all the Lord’s servants. They serve to demonstrate that these servants were not any better flesh than other men, and that it was not more richly endowed brains that gave them faith of devotedness, but simply the *supernatural* power of the Holy Spirit” (C. H. Bright). A.W.P.

Waiting at Wisdom's Gates

“Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors” (Prov. 8:34). In the Scriptures of truth no more than two classes of people are declared to be in the world. The one class is called “the blessed of the Lord,” and the other “the cursed of the Lord,” or “the people of God’s curse.” This latter class contains all the “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction”; all “the generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness”; all the “generation of vipers that cannot escape the damnation of hell”; in short, all “whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life,” who are not among those whom Jesus has “redeemed unto God out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” The former class, to which the characters spoken of in the text belong, contains all who are “chosen by God the Father in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love”; all whom He “predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made them accepted in the Beloved; in whom they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:3-7); all whom the Lord the Spirit “quickens into spiritual and eternal life” (Eph. 2:1); and all to whom Jehovah says, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). Of both these classes, or of the characters which make up these two distinct families, the Holy Spirit has given in His Word plain and striking descriptions. He has drawn their likenesses with His Divine and unerring hand, and has clearly separated the sheep from the goats, “the chaff from the wheat,” and “the precious from the vile.”

In the text we have exhibited to us the portrait of a blessed character, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. His features are drawn from the life by the Spirit of life with the pencil of Divine Truth, and happy are we if we can trace any of these features in the fleshy tables of our hearts, and discover any conformity to the image of Jesus in our souls. May it be our happiness to feel that we are of the “blessed of the Lord,” while attending to the description of the blessed man of whom Wisdom speaks. May “the light of life” shine upon the Word, and shine into our hearts, that although we may only see through a glass darkly, we may be enabled to hear the still small voice of the Lord saying to our souls, “Unto you is the word (and power) of this salvation sent.”

“Blessed is the man that heareth *Me*, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.” I. The first thing to be attended to in endeavoring to enter into these words, is to understand *who is the speaker*. By the context we find that it is one whose name is “Wisdom,” one who is holy, omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal; one who was “before all things, and by whom all things consist”; who, from everlasting, “from the beginning, or ever the earth was, was with the Lord, as one brought up by Him; who was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the habitable parts of His earth, and having His delights with, or His affections set upon, the sons of men.” In short, the speaker in my text is clearly the same with Him of whom it is written, “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6): “Christ, the power of God and the Wisdom of God unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks” (1 Cor. 1:24). Now this Divine, almighty, and all-wise Person is the promised Prophet of whom Moses wrote—Jehovah the Re-

deemer, who teaches those whom He calls to profit, and leads them in the way wherein they should go. He is here exhibited to us as a wise and affectionate mother, in which character He was well known to His people (Isa. 49:15; 66:13), giving instruction to her children, and encouraging them to be “patient continuance in well-doing.” I shall therefore, throughout this discourse, use the personal pronoun feminine, when referring to Immanuel Jesus, who says to all the elect family, “Hearken unto Me, ye children; for blessed are they that keep My ways, Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.”

By none but those who esteem themselves to be “fools” and “simple ones” is the teaching of Wisdom really valued. The wise and prudent of this world, the self-sufficient Pharisees, the unhumiliated professor of the Gospel, agree in despising and counting it as a thing of nought. But Wisdom makes all her blessed children to know and feel their great need of her Divine instruction; she causes them to hear her voice, and to turn at her reproof; she pours out her Spirit unto them, and makes known to them her words (Prov. 1:23); the entrance (or opening) of which giveth light and understanding to the simple (Psa. 119:130). But does Wisdom speak with an audible voice? Can the ears of the body catch the sound, and the natural understanding comprehend her words? No! Wisdom’s voice is audible only to the new creature, which hears it in the impressions that she makes upon the heart, and in the mysterious leadings of her providence. It is “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” “When Thou saidest, Seek ye My face, *my heart said* unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” But when may a man be said to have heard the voice of Wisdom? When does he give evidence of having received her Divine impressions, her heavenly and powerful operations, through the Spirit, in his heart? When a man is made to feel that he is in the hand of the holy, just, and sin-avenging Jehovah, against whom he has sinned; when his transgressions and iniquities are set before him in the light of God’s countenance; when he feels himself to be justly condemned (by the law which he has broken) to the second death, and to the endurance of the wrath of God for ever and ever.

When the depravity, deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of his heart is discovered to him, and he is left to cry in the bitterness of his soul, “Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”; when, like the leper, he covers his lip, and goes forth crying, “Unclean, unclean,” and putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be, there may be hope; when like Hezekiah, he turns his face to the wall, and weeps sore in secret before the Lord; when a sense of his darkness, ignorance, impotency, and unprofitableness, makes him cry “O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me”; when he finds all human cisterns to be broken, and that vain is the help of man; when he feels that he is shut up and cannot come forth; when a strong conviction of the ability of Jesus to save and heal him is in his heart, and he cries unto Him to deliver him from going down to the pit; when nothing short of the Lord the Spirit’s application of the love, blood, and righteousness of Jesus to his heart and conscience will satisfy him; and the spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon him, enabling him to pour out his soul before God, to acknowledge the iniquity of his transgression, to sue for mercy, to beg for pardon, teaching, wisdom, light, and power, and to crave for one smile, one look of love, one word from Christ’s lips, more than for his necessary food. I say, when he has experienced these

things, he has heard more than the voice of natural conscience; more than the word of man; more than the letter of the oracles of truth. He has heard the voice of the Lord, which is powerful and full of majesty, that breaketh the cedars in Lebanon, and maketh the hinds to calve. As one who was dead and in his grave, he has heard the voice of the Son of God, and has been quickened by Him (John 5:25). He has heard the words of Wisdom: her voice has sounded in his soul, and has produced this wonderful change; and to him these words now apply, "The ear that heareth the reproof of Wisdom shall abide among the wise." Happy, saith Wisdom, is the man that is in such a state; yea, "Blessed is the man that heareth Me."

Again. When he that hath climbed in over the wall, that has taken up a profession of religion without feeling its power, whose religion has hitherto been "feeding upon ashes," and who has never known the strait gate and narrow way, is awakened by the solemn feeling that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and that except a man be born from above, he cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God"; when the sluggard awakens from his slumber, and the man that was asleep upon the top of the mast has his eyes opened to see his danger, and his heart and mouth opened to implore assistance, when the Spirit Jehovah has blown upon the breast, and all its glory withers away; when natural knowledge of Divine truth, formal prayer, mock spirituality, feigned love, and presumptuous confidence become "a heap and desperate sorrow"; when examining himself whether he be in the faith, and trying himself by the test of God's Word, his faith is found to stand not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man, his hope to be a false one, his love only fleshly and excited feelings, his zeal a spark from the fire of his own kindling, his wisdom folly; when he sees Tekel written upon his forehead and he trembles lest he should be lost after all his profession; when he cannot find that God has begun a good work in him, and yet lifts up his voice and entreats the Lord to have mercy upon him, and lead him in the way everlasting; when his spirit is broken with grief and sorrow, his strength has failed him and is gone, his beauty is turned into corruption, his sweet smell becomes a stink, and his girdle a rent; when, under these feelings, he is constrained to sit alone and keep silence, to separate from those he once walked with, and to esteem those to be the excellent of the earth that he once despised; when he feels the vanity of all teaching but Divine teaching, the folly of all wisdom which comes not from "the Spirit of Wisdom," and the abomination of all religion that is not planted in the heart by God's own hand; when he besieges the throne of grace with fervent petitions that he may not go on deceiving and being deceived, but that he may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent; that he may have godly sorrow bestowed upon him, to work in his soul repentance not to be repented of; and that he may have the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, put into his heart, with faith, hope, and love, a tender conscience, godly sincerity, truth, uprightness, meekness, and humility. *Then* he may be said to have heard the still small voice of Wisdom, to have heard her rod, and who hath appointed it. He has then the features of a "blessed" man; "Blessed is the man that heareth Me."

But there are other ways in which the blessed man hears the voice of Wisdom. "My people," saith the Lord, "are bent to backsliding." And there is no blessed man who is not sensible of the truth of this declaration. Wisdom speaks to her backsliding children, and makes them know that they have committed two evils: in forsaking her, the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no

water. Thus, when he who has backslidden in heart from Wisdom's ways, who has got entangled in the snares of his sinful heart, the world that lies in wickedness and the father of lies; when he who has "mingled himself among the people," and has become as "a cake not turned," unsavory to the world, and burdensome to the church, lukewarm, carnal, and careless; when he to whom neither heavenly things nor earthly things afford satisfaction; when he who has not heart for the former, and is condemned and unhappy in the latter; when (I say) such a one begins to feel the error of his way, to bemoan himself, to look upwards, and confess his sin to the Lord; to loathe himself and to cry "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned"; to long for the snare in which he is held to be broken, to be enabled once more to feel the Lord to be nigh; to be permitted to draw near unto Him without alarm, weariness, or aversion; to walk in His ways, to rejoice in His smiles, and to tremble at His frowns; to delight himself in God, to seek His glory; when he "accepts the punishment of his iniquity," "smarts under his wounds," groans under his hardness, roars like a bear, and mourns sore like a dove; when he is brought to lie in the dust, covered with shame, and is sometimes a little cheered by a word of encouragement for a moment resting upon his drooping spirit, producing softness, contrition, self-abasement, and greater desire to be permitted to touch the hem of Wisdom's garment; when his conscience no longer lets him do violence to it without striking "a dart through his liver," and every backward step adds "grief to his sorrow"; when he is constrained to attend to and to obey the commands that are laid upon his heart, although it mortifies his pride and debases him in the sight of man so to do; when, though his prayer seems to be shut out from the Lord, and a cloud is upon the Throne of Grace, he yet calls, cries, and shouts, nor can give Wisdom any rest until she hears and answers; *then* he hears her voice, and Wisdom, sooner or later, makes him feel that "blessed is the man that heareth" her.

Thus, then, Wisdom's voice is heard in conviction of sin, in the breaking down and rooting up of false religion, and in the convincing of the backslider that his ways are crooked and bitter. But has she no voice to declare where are her footsteps in providence, and her ways in love, mercy, grace, and faithfulness? Has this gentle, affectionate, and wise mother no kind words for her children, no promises, no consolations for her burdened and mourning family? She has; she does not use the rod alone; she does not only wound, kill, and bring down; she has words of healing, words of restoring, words of deliverance, words of gracious instruction, of tender faithfulness. In providential trials she often causes her blessed children to feel and confess that there was a needs-be for the affliction. She calls them to her feet, to make known their wants, and puts words into their hearts that they may plead with her and prevail. The blessed Spirit enlightens their eyes to see her smiles in the parting of the clouds, and sometimes to discern her good will where, to reason, there is no trace of it. Many have found, and still find, that seasons of temporal calamity are made by Wisdom, the way of entrance to her chambers, and the way of approach to her bosom. Greater nearness to her, more dependence upon her almighty arm, more confidence in her mercy and goodness, a deeper sense of her power to deliver, and of the fullness of her blessed words, are more frequently found in adversity than were felt in prosperity. Something secret, but strong, keeps the blessed man looking to his gentle mother for help and protection, something causes him to take shelter under her outspread wings; and although unbelief would sink him with despondency, something is communicated to him which holds him up, and constrains him to say, "I will trust Thee, though Thou slay me." He believes that he will be extricated from his difficulty,

but how he cannot tell. He feels that he cannot fall, but he sees not how he can stand. He believes that assistance will be afforded but he cannot guess from what quarter it will come. Here he often hangs, like a balance blown upon by the winds; sometimes the scale of faith and hope is the more weighty, and sometimes that of fear and doubt. And thus he is kept, till Wisdom suddenly comes to her temple, and causes her voice to be heard in the deliverance which she brings.

Wisdom can speak by an angel; by the ravens and brook; by a prophet; by fire from Heaven; by preserving her children unhurt in the flames; by shutting the mouths of the lions; by slaying Goliath by the hand of a stripling, armed with a sling and a stone; by multiplying the loaves and fishes; by restoring the sick child to health; by opening the eyes of the blind, making the lame man to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing. Wisdom never wants for means, nor can any deafness prevent her voice from being heard when she deigns to speak. Sweet is her voice to those who hear it; powerful is her arm unto those in whose behalf it is revealed; loving is her heart to those that lie near her bosom; and full of consolation are her breasts to those whom she causes to seek and be satisfied therewith. Wisdom's voice, then, drives fear away and brings comfort and thankfulness, in providential things; and does it not effect the same in spiritual concerns? Yes; here too she speaks; here is she heard. When bowed down under an accumulation of guilt, sin, and misery, and the soul is faint within, because Wisdom has so long kept silence, and has seemed inattentive to the groaning and sighing of the prisoner; when fears of destruction are many, and the cable is strained to the utmost, and seems just ready to snap and sever the vessel from the anchor by which it is held; then does Wisdom speak, then her "fear not" is heard; then does she sprinkle her peace-speaking blood upon the guilty conscience, or give power to the faint, to lay hold upon some merciful declaration, gracious invitation, or cheering promise. She speaks away all the guilt, and fills the soul with peace and joy in believing, or helps it with a little help, and strengthens it with a little strength, as she sees good. To some she speaks with more, and to some with less power. Some hear her voice of love and mercy frequently and clearly, and some rarely and faintly. But *all* her children *do* hear her voice, and experience, in measure and degree, the blessedness of her words to the weary, heavy-laden, destitute, guilty, and forlorn. Some hear it on their knees, and some when walking by the way and conversing or meditating on the things pertaining to salvation. Some hear it under the preached Word, and some in reading the Word. Some hear it in a text applied verbatim, and some in the substance of a text gradually distilling its dew upon the soul. But in whatever degree or in whatever way Wisdom's voice is heard, the like effects are produced, the like spices flow out; sensible relief, grace, mercy, and goodness are felt, which lead the soul to repentance; brokenness of heart, humility, and abasement of self are found; the sinner is brought low, and the Savior is exalted; the creature lies in the dust, and the Creator fills the throne; unbelief is silenced, and faith is heard; pride is stained, and a meek and lowly spirit is put on; fear and torment are cast out, and love is shed abroad in the heart; Christ is All and in all, and the creature is nothing in nothing. O blessed is the man that hears this voice, that is come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel; for says Wisdom, "Blessed is the man that heareth Me." None but the blessed long to hear this voice; they alone hear Wisdom speaking, in reproofs and pardon, in chastisement and mercy, in darkness and in light, in sorrow and in consolation, in warnings and in promises, in death and in life.

(Completed in the next issue).

Dispensationalism

2. *The Purpose of God (Concluded)*

Let us resume at the point where we closed the second section of this article. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). The attentive reader will at once note a change in the tense of the verb from that employed in the previous verses, which at once marks the division in thought or subject. In verse 3 it was "who hath blessed," in verse 4 "hath chosen us," verse 5 "having predestinated us," and in verse 6 "hath made us accepted"; in each case the reference is to the decision or act of the Father in the everlasting covenant, before the foundations of the world were laid. But in verse 7 it is "in whom we *have* redemption," etc.—another set of blessings is there introduced, blessings which become the saints' portion in a time-state, and which are the means by which they reach the ultimate goal of eternal glory.

It would lead us too far afield to give here an exposition of Ephesians 1:7-9, so we must content ourselves with a bare outline. First, all the blessings which God's elect enjoy now are based upon the "redemption" which they have in Christ. Second, three comprehensive blessings are named: "forgiveness of sins," which is the negative side of justification. Then regeneration, or the Spirit's work of quickening (v. 8): the greatness of this blessing is signified by the "wherein He hath abounded toward us"; the nature of it—working in us "wisdom (cf. Psa. 19:7, Prov. 2:10, Eph. 1:17) and prudence"; the cause being "the good pleasure of His will" (v.9). Third, the making known of all that is said in verses 3-8, which is through the preaching of the Word. Now it is this last point which we must enlarge upon.

As the opening verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, it was not only at "sundry times" (in broken fragments, as it were) but in "divers manners" that God, in bygone ages, communicated to men a knowledge of His eternal counsels. Yet, though the "manners" were diverse or varied, there was an unmistakable unity underlying them, as well as a noticeable progress in them. Central in all of them was the revelation of the Covenant of Grace, which, when understood in the most extensive sense, comprehends all the designs and transactions respecting the redemption of God's elect by Jesus Christ. The Covenant of Grace is in sharp contrast from the Covenant (or "law") of Works, under which man was first made. This Covenant of Grace (or Everlasting Covenant) is the foundation of all the favour which is shown unto the redeemed Church throughout time and eternity.

Now the Covenant of Grace is made known in the Gospel, which "Gospel," as Galatians 3:8 tells us, was "preached to Abraham," and which Hebrews 4:2 declares was "preached unto" the nation of Israel. When that Gospel is truly and cordially embraced there is a covenant transaction that takes place between God in Christ and every believer: this it is which is signified by "*laying hold of God's covenant*" (Isa. 56:4, 6), and which was figured of old when men entered into a covenant with God. Then it is that God also enters into a covenant with us, for when the believing sinner heartily receives the Gospel, he has fulfilled the only condition required from him, and is at once entitled to all the promises of the covenant and salvation is made sure to him; for one of the promises of the covenant, as proposed to men by God is, that he who once truly believes and accepts of the offer made to him in the Gospel, shall never fall from it, so as to fail to receive the blessings of it. It is in this respect an everlasting covenant, as it ensures eternal life, can

never fail or be broken by either party in covenant.

The terms of this covenant which God makes with His believing people are described in the following words, “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:40). This is the covenant of which David speaks, “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for *this* is all my salvation, and *all* my desire” (2 Sam. 23:5). The tenor of this covenant of God is stated as follows, “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:10-12).

This Covenant of Grace is also called in Scripture a *new* or second covenant, in distinction from another and previous covenant. This is the Covenant between the Triune God and Christ the Mediator. The first or old covenant was between God and the first Adam as representing all mankind (Hosea 6:7 margin; Job 31:33), as the legal and public head. That between God and the last Adam, the Redeemer of the elect, their legal Representative and public Head, is a second and new one; and it is this which lays the foundation of the covenant between God and believers. Absolutely speaking, the covenant between God and Christ is *not* a “new” one, for it was entered into long before Adam was created; but relatively, it is spoken of as “new” *as it was made known to men*, more fully, in contrast from the Covenant of Works, under which all mankind were antecedent to redemption by Christ; which covenant of works was brought into view and kept most in sight under the Mosaic economy or dispensation.

“The covenant made with the children of Israel was in the form of a covenant of works. The law of works was exhibited first, and brought most clearly into sight, that it might be known to be what it really is; and the covenant of grace, or the Gospel, though revealed, and contained in that covenant (with Israel) was not set in open light, but covered and in a measure hid under the types and shadows of that covenant; and under the form of a covenant of works, as the nucleus or kernel is covered and hid with the husk or shell that surrounds it. So that they who were not spiritual, discerning and attentive, saw only the outside, and considered it as wholly a covenant of works; and hoped for justification by it, in that view. It is certain this was the case with the nation of the Jews in general, in the apostles’ days. They sought righteousness and justification, as it were, by the works of the law: they were ignorant of God’s righteousness, and attempted to establish their own righteousness, the righteousness of the law (Rom. 9:32, 10:3).

“This form of a covenant of works is represented by *the veil* which Moses put over his face, when speaking to the people: ‘So that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament (or the old covenant); which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart’ (2 Cor. 3:13-15). In *this* view of it, and considered as exhibiting the covenant of works, St. Paul calls the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, and that dispensation, ‘The ministration of death and condemnation, written and engraved on stones’ (2 Cor. 3:7). It is therefore said ‘the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). The dispensation under Moses was a legal

dispensation, exhibiting law in the form of a covenant of works: one particular, and perhaps the principal design of it, was to reveal the Divine law in strictness, extent and glory of it; as necessary to prepare for the clear and open manifestation of the covenant of grace; which was then in a great measure hid, and more obscurely revealed under types; so that the whole was but a *shadow* of the good things of the covenant of grace (Heb. 10:1).

“Therefore the revelation made by Moses is called the *law*; and the covenant into which the children of Israel entered, is represented as a legal covenant, a covenant of works, to which the covenant of grace is opposed, as another and a new covenant. One quotation from Scripture, out of many that might be mentioned, will ascertain this: namely Hebrews 8:6-9. Therefore the Gospel is called the ‘new testament,’ and the Mosaic dispensation is called the ‘old testament’: see 2 Corinthians 3:6, 14.

“The covenant of grace has been revealed to men, and has been administered in different forms, and by various methods ever since the first intimation of mercy to sinners, made soon after the first human apostasy; and by it all true believers have been saved from that time to this; and none have been saved in any other way; nor will any be saved in any other way but this, to the end of the world; and in this respect it is an everlasting covenant. . . From Moses to the coming of Christ, the covenant of grace was made known and administered: and the Gospel was preached to the children of Israel, through all that time, and all the pious were saved by it, though it was covered under the form of a covenant of works, as has been observed and explained.

“The law, as a covenant of works, was not exhibited in the revelation made to the children of Israel by Moses, as it has been now explained, under the notion that any man could obtain the favour of God, and be saved by this law or covenant; for this was impossible. But this law was thus revealed and *added*, that it might be known what the law was, and that men might be hereby convinced, that no man can be justified by the works of the law, as by his sins he is under the curse of it; and that under this conviction, and despairing of salvation by the covenant of works, they might be led to understand and embrace the covenant of grace, the way of salvation by faith in the Redeemer. This is the light in which this point is set by the apostle Paul: ‘Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe’ (Gal. 3:21, 22).

“This was the end which the revelation of this law answered, to those who were saved under that dispensation; and it is suited and designed to answer this same end to those who shall be saved, to the end of the world: for by the law thus revealed is the knowledge of sin, and the curse of God, under which all men are, who do not believe in Christ. Thus St. Paul states the matter with regard to himself: ‘I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died’ (Rom. 7:7-9). Though the Redeemer had not actually performed and gone through what He had undertaken to do and suffer; yet it being engaged and made certain, all believers who lived before His incarnation, were saved by virtue of His sufferings and obedience, which were certain to take place in due time.

“We trust the difference and opposition between the covenant of works and the new

covenant, the covenant of grace, have been made clear above. The former requires perfect obedience as the condition of life, as the price to recommend to the favour of God, which is the righteousness of the law of works. The latter consists in a testimony and promise on God's part, requiring nothing of man but that belief of this testimony and promise, which implies a cordial reception of the good things exhibited and offered in this covenant, without offering any thing as the price of them; but receiving them as a free gift to a sinner, infinitely guilty and wretched. The condition of the first is out of the reach of man: it is impossible he should obtain righteousness by it, because he is a sinner. The last is made effectual by the Spirit to all of God's elect, saving every one that believeth.

“The apostle Paul states the difference and opposition between these two covenants from the writing of Moses, which proves that *both* these covenants *were revealed* in that dispensation. His words are these: ‘Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them (See Lev. 18:5). But the righteousness *which is of faith* speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: (See *Deut.* 30:11-14) that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved’ (Rom. 10:5-9).

“In the preaching of the Gospel, the covenant of grace is proposed and the blessings it contains are offered to all to whom it comes, upon their believing and heartily approving the way of salvation therein proposed; for all who thus comply come up to the condition of the covenant on their part, and consequently are interested in all the promises of it” (Samuel Hopkins). Christ and His benefits are offered to all who hear the Gospel: the Lord Jesus says, “He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath One that judgeth him” (John 12:48), and none can *reject* Him to whom He is never “offered.”

The lengthy quotation which we have made above, from one who was contemporaneous with and an intimate friend of the celebrated Jonathan Edwards, contains one of the most lucid and illuminating treatments of that aspect of the theme we are dealing with which we have ever come across in all our readings. We earnestly commend it to the best attention of interested readers. It throws a flood of light upon the Mosaic economy. It shows how that under the dispensation of the Old Testament the Everlasting Covenant was being administered and its blessings bestowed. It calls attention to the fact that the (seemingly incompatible elements of) Law and the Gospel were being proclaimed at one and the same time, that the claims of God were being pressed and the grace of God manifested during the same period.

From what has been brought out above, it should be plain that preaching the Gospel implies and entails a declaration of the whole system of truth and duty contained in the Scripture. Though some truths are more essential and important than others, and though the Gospel may truly be preached while some are overlooked, yet it cannot be *fully* preached unless the whole of Divine revelation is brought into view, and therefore must be in a degree defective. Therefore, to preach the Gospel is to do as Paul did and “declare all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Every doctrine revealed in the Word, and every duty prescribed, has a connection with the whole, and all make but one consistent system.

Finally, what has been said above should make it clear that the preaching of the Covenant of Grace (the Gospel) *does not* annul the Law of God, nor discharge men from duty and obedience; but requires and demands obedience of all to whom it is preached. The Law is not in the least abolished in the extent and strictness of its precepts by the Gospel. Christ's deliverance of His people from the curse of the Law, no more lessens their obligations to obey the Law perfectly, than His healing of the impotent man rendered it needless for Him to say, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). No, the Law remains as much the measure and rule of duty to the Christian, as ever it was, and he is no further holy than he is conformed to the Law, loving God with all his heart, mind and strength and his neighbour as himself. Thus the preaching of the Gospel does not make void the Law, but establishes it (Rom. 3:31). A.W.P.

Assurance Dialogue 3

In the communicating of His Word God was pleased to speak “at sundry times and in divers manners” (Heb. 1:1). In the Scriptures of Truth we have clear doctrinal instruction and plain precepts for the regulation of conduct, but we also find “dark parables” and mysterious symbols. Side by side is history and allegory, hymns of praise and practical proverbs, precious promises and intricate prophecies. Variety stamps all the works and ways of God. This illustrates a principle which should guide those whom the Lord has called to teach His Word: there should be variety both in the matter of their messages and the methods employed in delivering them. Many are unable to apprehend abstract statements, comparatively few have minds trained to follow a course of logical reasoning. The teacher then, ought to adapt himself to the capacity of his hearers. Blessedly do we find this exemplified in the ministry of the perfect Teacher. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was largely by question and answer. Having this in mind, we feel it may be wise to follow the last two articles on “Assurance” by another one in dialogue form.

“Good evening, friend Humble Heart.” “Good evening, Mr. Editor. This is a pleasant surprise, for I was not expecting to be favoured with a visit from one of God’s servants: I do not feel worthy of their notice.” Editor: “According to my promise, I have been seeking to remember you before the Throne of Grace, and while in prayer this morning there was impressed on my mind those words, ‘Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees’ (Heb. 12:12). I have been impressed of late by that lovely prophetic picture of Christ found in Isaiah 40:11, ‘He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.’ The Savior devotes special care and tenderness upon the weak of the flock, and in this He has left an example which the under-shepherds need to follow.”

Brother Humble Heart: “It is indeed kind of you, Sir, to bestow any trouble upon such a poor, worthless creature as I am: I should have thought your time had been more profitably employed in ministering to those who *can* take in the Truth quickly, and who grow in it by leaps and bounds; as for me, I am so dull and stupid, so full of doubtings and fears, that your labours on me are wasted.” Editor: “Ah, my friend, all is not gold that glitters. The great majority of those who ‘take in the Truth quickly’ only do so intellectually—it has no power over the heart; and those who ‘grow by leaps and bounds,’ grow too swiftly for it to be real, or worth anything spiritually. Truth has to be ‘bought’ (Prov. 23:23): ‘bought’ by frequent meditation thereon, by taking it home unto ourselves, by deep exercises of conscience, by wrestling with God in prayer, that He would apply it in power to the soul.”

Brother H.H.: “Yes, I realize that, and it makes me feel so bad because God’s Word has not been written on *my* heart. I have gone over in my mind, again and again, all that you said at our last interview, and I am sure that I am unregenerate.” Editor: “What leads you to such a conclusion?” Brother H.H.: “This, if I had been regenerated the Holy Spirit would be dwelling within me, and in that case He would be producing His blessed fruit in my heart and life. It is written, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance’ (self-control)—Galatians 5:22, 23; and as I have endeavored to examine and search myself, I discover in me the very opposite of these heavenly graces.”

Editor: “God’s workings in grace and His ways in the material creation have much in

common, and if we observe closely the latter, we may learn much about the former. Now in the natural realm the production of fruit is often a slow process. Glance out now at the trees, and how do they look? They are leafless, and seem to be dead. Yet they are not; the vital sap is still in their roots, even though no signs of it be apparent to us. But in a little while, under the genial warmth of the sun, those trees will be covered with blossoms. Then, after a few days, those pretty blossoms will all have disappeared—blown off by the winds. Nevertheless, if those trees be examined closely it will be found that where those blossoms were, are now little green buds. Many weeks have to pass before the owner of those trees is gladdened by seeing the buds develop into fruit.

“A further lesson may be learned from our gardens. The orchard teaches us the need for patience: the garden instructs us to expect and overcome disappointments. Here is a bed, which has been carefully prepared, and sown with seed. Later, the seed springs up and the plants appear from which the flowers are to grow. But side by side there spring up many weeds too. The uninstructed gardener was not expecting this, and is apt to be discouraged. Before he sowed the flower seed, he thought he had carefully rooted up every nettle, thistle, and obnoxious plant; but now the bed has in it more weeds than flowers. So it is my Brother with the heart of the Christian. Though the incorruptible seed of God’s Word is planted there (1 Peter 1:23), yet the heart—neglected all through the years of unregeneracy—is overgrown with weeds (the lusts of the flesh), and to the anointed eye the heart looks more like the Devil’s weed plot than ‘the King’s garden’ (2 Kings 25:4).”

Brother Humble Heart: “What you have just referred to in the natural realm is quite obvious, but I am not so clear about the spiritual application. Does not your last illustration belittle the work and power of the Holy Spirit? You have often quoted in your articles that Christ saves His people ‘*from their sins*’ (Matt. 1:21), how, then, can any person rightfully regard himself as saved, while he is conscious that many sins have dominion over him?” Editor: “I am glad you raised this point, for many dear souls are often troubled over it. Concerning the work and power of the Holy Spirit: light is thrown on this by various expressions which God has used in His Word. For example, in 2 Corinthians 1:22 (cf. Eph. 1:13, 14) we read that God has ‘*given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*’ Now an ‘earnest’ means a part, and not the whole—an installment, as it were; the fullness of the Spirit’s power and blessing is communicated to no Christian in this life. So again in Romans 8:23, ‘ourselves also, which have *the first fruits* of the Spirit’—a pledge, a sample only, of future greater abundance.

“Let me call your attention to the words which immediately follow those just quoted from Romans 8:23, namely, ‘even we ourselves groan within ourselves’ which is the more striking because this same thing is seen again in 2 Corinthians 5:4, 5. So those who *are* indwelt by the Spirit of God are a ‘groaning’ people! It is true that the unregenerate ‘groan’ at times: when suffering great bodily pain, or over some heavy loss; but the ‘groaning’ of the Christian is occasioned by something very different: he groans over the remains of depravity still left within him, over the flesh so often successfully resisting the Spirit, over seeing around him so much that is dishonouring to Christ. This is clear from Romans 7:24 and its context, Philippians 3:18, etc.”

Brother Humble Heart: “But only a few days ago I mentioned some of these very Scriptures to one whom I regard as an eminent saint, and he told me that he had ‘got out of Romans 7 into Romans 8’ long ago.” Editor: “But as we have seen, the Christian in

Romans 8 ‘groans’ (v. 23)!” Brother H.H.: “The one I had reference to laughed at me, for my doubts and fears, told me I was dishonouring God by listening to the Devil.” Editor: “It is much to be feared that he is a complete stranger to those exercises of heart which are experienced by every regenerate soul, and knows nothing of that heart-anguish and soul-travail which ever precedes *spiritual* assurance. The Lord Jesus did not laugh at fearing souls, but said, ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’ It is clear that your acquaintance does not understand your case.”

Brother H.H.: “But do you mean to say that all of God’s children are as wretched in soul as I am?” Editor: “No, I would not say that. The Holy Spirit does not give the same degree of light on the exceeding sinfulness of sin to all alike, nor does He reveal so fully unto all, their own inward depravity. Moreover, just as God has appointed different seasons to the year, so no true Christian is always the same in his soul: there are cheerful days of spring and gloomy days of autumn, both in the natural and in the spiritual. ‘But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day’ (Prov. 4:18), nevertheless ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22). Both are true, though we are not always conscious of them both.”

Brother H.H.: “I do not believe that any real Christian is ever plagued as I am: plagued so often with a spirit of rebellion, with unbelief, with pride, with such vile thoughts and desires that I would blush to mention them.” Editor: “Ah, my Brother, few unregenerate souls would be honest enough to acknowledge as much! The very fact that these inward workings of sin plague you, is clear proof that you *are* regenerate, that there is within you a nature or principle of holiness which loathes all that is unholy. It is this which causes the Christian to ‘groan,’ nevertheless this brings him into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. While here the Lord Jesus was ‘the Man of Sorrows,’ and that which occasioned all His grief was sin—not His own, for He had none; but the sins of others. This then is one reason why God leaves the sinful nature in His people even after regeneration: that mourning over it they may be conformed to their suffering Head.”

Brother H.H.: “But how does this tally with Christ’s saving His people from their sins?” Editor: “Matthew 1:21 in nowise clashes with what I have been saying. Christ saves His people from the guilt and punishment of their sins, because that was transferred to and vicariously suffered by Him. He saves us too from the pollution of sin: His Spirit moves us to see, grieve over, confess our sins, and plead the precious blood; and as this is done in faith, the conscience is cleansed. He also saves us from the reigning power of sin, so that the Christian is no longer the absolute and abject slave of sin and Satan. Moreover, the ultimate fulfillment of this blessed promise (like that of many others) is yet future: the time is coming when the Lord Jesus shall rid His people of the very presence of sin, so that they shall be done with it forever.”

Brother H.H.: “While on that point I wish you would explain to me those words ‘sin shall not have dominion over you’ (Rom. 6:14).” Editor: “Observe first what that verse does not say: it is not ‘sin shall not haunt and harass you’ or ‘sin shall not trip you and occasion many a fall’; had it said *that*, every Christian might well despair. To ‘have dominion over’ signifies the legal right to command another, such as a parent has over his child, or as one nation has over another which has been completely conquered in war. Such *legal*

Brother H.H.: “Thank you; but may I ask another question: Why is it that some of

God's children are not plagued by sin as I am?" Editor: "How can you be sure that they are not? 'The heart knoweth his own bitterness' (Prov. 14:10.)" Brother H.H.: "But I can tell from their peaceful countenances, their conversation, their joy in the Lord, that it cannot so be the case with them." Editor: "Some are blest with a more cheerful natural disposition than others. Some keep shorter accounts with God, making it a point of conscience to confess every known sin to Him. Some are more diligent in using the means of grace: they who neglect the reading of God's Word, meditation thereon, and approach the Throne of Grace only occasionally and formally, cannot expect to have healthy souls."

Brother H.H.: "I admit I cannot meet your arguments. What you say is doubtless true of God's people, but my case is far worse than you realize: I have such a sink of iniquity within, and so often find myself listless toward all that is spiritual, that I greatly fear there can be no assurance for me." Editor: "It is the Devil who tells you that." Brother H.H.: "How can one distinguish between the harassing doubts which the Devil injects, and the convictions of sin and piercing of the conscience which the Holy Spirit produces?" Editor: "*By the effects produced.* Satan will tell you that it is no use to resist indwelling sin any longer, that it is useless to pray any more. He seeks to produce despair, and tells many harassed souls they might as well commit suicide and put an end to their misery. But when the Holy Spirit convicts a Christian, He also works in his heart a godly sorrow, and moves him to acknowledge his transgressions to God: He leads to the Throne of Grace and gives again a sight of the cleansing blood of Christ; and this not once or twice, but to the end of our earthly lives. 'For a just man falleth seven times, *and riseth up again*' (Prov. 24:16). If then this agrees with your own experience, you must be a Christian."

Brother H.H.: "I cannot but be struck with the fact that *your* counsel and instruction are the very opposite of what was given to me by the last person I spoke to about my sorrows. He is a man very wise in the Scriptures, having scores of passages at his finger's end. He told me that the only way to get rid of my doubting was to believe the Word, and that every time I felt miserable to lay hold of one of the promises." Editor: "I think I know the company to which that man belongs. All they believe in is a *natural* faith, which lies in the power of the creature; a faith which is merely the product of our own will-power. But *that* is not the 'faith of God's elect.' Spiritual faith is the gift of God, and only the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit can call it forth into action in any of us. Shun such a people, my Brother. Avoid all who give no real place to the Holy Spirit, but would make you believe that the remedy lies in your own 'free will.' Seek more the company and communion of God Himself, and beg Him for Christ's sake to increase your faith and stay your mind upon Himself." A.W.P.

Deliverance from Prison

“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name” (Psa. 142:7). It is not certain that David composed this Psalm in the Cave of Adullam, when he had fled from Achish king of Gath, or in the cave of Engedi, when he had taken refuge from the wrath of Saul (1 Sam. 22:1, 2 and 24:1-3). But this is a matter of very little consequence to us; as it is the state of his soul we want to come at, in order to render the subject profitable to the Lord’s tempted, tried, and harassed people, whose souls are often in such a state of captivity as obliges them to cry with the Psalmist “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name.” Let us, then, notice the threefold state of imprisonment of a spiritual nature which the Scriptures speak of, and with which all God’s elected, redeemed, and regenerated people, are, more or less acquainted.

First, our attention is directed to that condition of thralldom we are all in by nature; namely, “the pit wherein is no water” (Zech. 9:11), under sin’s dark dominion (Rom. 3:9), under the law and subject to its curse; as the Apostle observes, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). And, “what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). Thus men are shut up under the law, in unbelief, led captive by the Devil at his will, are wholly under the power and dominion of sin and Satan; for he is the strong man armed, that has the possession of the heart, and keepeth his house in peace. And yet men fancy they are at liberty; or, if bound at all, that it is so slightly, they can at any time break their chains, open the prison doors, and let themselves out. Awful delusion! But the child of God made sensible of his imprisoned state, does not think and speak thus, but, with the Psalmist, he confesses his bondage, sighs and groans under it, and cries unto the Lord, who alone can set his soul at liberty, and redeem his life from destruction.

We now come to notice the *second* state of imprisonment; which is, the condition of soul of a sinner, made sensible of his undone, wretched, and miserable state, arising from the law having come with power to his heart in the hand of its Divine Author by which he has knowledge of sin, and the wrath and curse of God due to him as a vile offender; his soul, which was previously dead in sins, and lay unconsciously imprisoned, is now quickened by the eternal Spirit, and feels sin a burden; the hand of God lies upon him, pressing him sore; he is shut up under the law, and cannot come forth, has no soundness in his flesh, because of a sense of God’s anger; neither is there any rest in his bones, because of his iniquities, for they are gone over his head as a heavy burden, too heavy for him to bear; he is troubled and bowed down greatly, seeing others walk at large, and, mourning his own lonely state, longs for deliverance. But he can no more come out of this low dungeon, this horrible pit, this mire and clay, of himself, by his own strength or exertions, than he can create a world; and the more he struggles to break off his chains, and open the prison doors, and come out by his legal works, the more he gets entangled, and the deeper he sinks in the pit, for he finds that the law demands perfect and perpetual obedience, is inflexible, and will not abate the least mite. Therefore, the Lord alone can bring a soul out of prison and set it at liberty; hence we read that “God setteth the solitary in families: He bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwelleth in a dry land” (Psa. 68:6).

This is alone of His free favour, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, by means of the Gospel of His grace, which “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). And the man who has thus been imprisoned and delivered, knows when, by whom, and by what means he was brought out. He knows that it is owing to the love of God the Father, as the *moving* cause; and to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the sinner’s Surety, in His obedience, death and resurrection, as the *procuring* cause, by whose doing and dying the law is magnified and made honourable, and the justice of God completely satisfied: therefore the poor prisoner is sent out of the pit wherein is no water, by virtue of the blood of the covenant: the lawful captive is delivered, and the prey taken from the terrible one; he is ransomed from Hell, and delivered from going down into the pit of endless misery. He knows, too, that it is owing to the power and grace of God the Spirit as the *efficient* cause, who has shed abroad the love of God in his heart, brought near the blood, righteousness, and salvation of Christ, and testified of the validity and efficacy of His blood to pardon, His righteousness to justify, and of His power to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him; having wrought faith in his heart to look to, and confide in the merits of Christ. Nor can he ever forget the mercy of God to him, a lost and helpless sinner, who was just ready to perish, when the great trumpet of love, pardon, and salvation was blown in his heart by the almighty Spirit, and his soul set at sweet and happy liberty thereby from the yoke of bondage, freed from Satan’s heavy chain, and brought out of the prison house into the glorious liberty of the children of God, to hold converse and communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ by an unction from the Holy One.

Such distinguishing goodness and mercy, known and felt in the soul, are sure to produce gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving unto the Eternal Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: and in this consists the very essence of religion: for if we know nothing of bondage, we know nothing of spiritual liberty, if we have never felt our imprisoned state, we never knew what it was to be brought out of prison. Some, however, talk of the great joy they feel, but we never hear of the sorrow that they have had; of great liberty, but nothing do we hear of their imprisonment. They begin at the wrong end at first, who talk about their liberty before experiencing bondage; of the joy of God’s salvation before their sorrow, from a sense of condemnation; of the pleasures of Heaven before they have felt the pains of Hell. But here, lest any should be wounded whom God would not have wounded, we would observe that there are different degrees of imprisonment. While we maintain that all God’s children know what it is to be in prison of soul, yet all are not alike in prison, some being more closely confined, feeling greater darkness and horror, and being more roughly treated, as it were; while others experience milder treatment, and are not so long confined. Because some are three months in prison, it does not follow that all should lie there so long; or that because the chain of some is peculiarly heavy, and their dungeon exceedingly dark and dismal, that the chain of all should be equally galling, and their misery alike great; for, as the poet expresses,

“Some souls are fifty pieces deep,
and some five hundred owe.”

But as the Savior saith, “But when they had nothing to pay, the creditor frankly forgave them both” (Luke 7:41, 42). God is a sovereign and has a right to do as he pleases in this matter, either to doom a sinner in sorrows sharp and long to lay, or speedily turn his gloomy night into bright sunshine; as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, who was three days in

the prison of soul distress before the Lord brought him out into liberty; while those who were converted unto God on the day of Pentecost were not so long as that in soul distress; for we read, “*then* they that *gladly* received his word were baptized: and the *same day* were added unto the church” (Acts 2:41). And the Philippian jailer was not so long detained as this, before his captivity was turned; for we read that “he took them (Paul and Silas) the *same hour* of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. . .and *rejoiced*, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:33, 34). But whether the time of a sinner’s imprisonment be long or short, we know that it is according to the appointment of God; and when He sets the souls of His people at liberty, and continues to smile upon them, they have sweet peace of mind, “rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh; but when He hides His face, then they are cast down again; as the Psalmist says, “Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.”

This leads us to notice, more particularly, the *third* state of imprisonment; which happens when the soul that has been made clean, and brought out of prison into liberty, returns again into darkness of mind, despondency and dejection; having no access to God in prayer, no sensible enjoyment of His presence, no communion with his heavenly Father either in private supplication and reading of the Word, or in public ordinances; but he is shut up; the Word is a sealed book, yielding no consolation, but condemnation; and when he goes to the house of God it is the same, while others are blessed under the Word preached, feeling its power and sweetness and are praising God, he is cast down, goes mourning without the sun, feels nothing but the vile affections of his deceitful heart, and is fretful and rebellious when he hears others speak of the goodness of the Lord to them. Thus as a prison is a place of confinement, he finds his soul “shut up and *cannot* come forth”: for a soul in this state requires the same power that brought him out of his first imprisonment, to bring him out of this low dungeon.

And as a prison is a place of darkness, so he walks in darkness and has no light, is solitary, sighs and groans, and concludes that the mercy of God is gone forever; but now and then hope springs up, and he prays, with some degree of confidence, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name”: and God will hear his prayer. Although this imprisonment be long, and occasioned by his own folly, in departing from “the Fountain of living waters,” and hewing out to himself “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”: for the Lord has said, that if His children forsake His law, He “will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail” (Psa. 89:32, 33). “He heareth the poor, and despiseth not His prisoners” (Psa. 69: 33). He “looked down from the height of His sanctuary, to hear the groans of His prisoners: to loose those that are appointed to death. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer” (Psa. 102:17-20). And the covenant promise of God the Father to Jesus Christ the Son, runs thus, “I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles: To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isa. 42:6, 7). And Christ saith, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Luke 4:18).

Now the Lord must come to the prisoner and set him free, and not wait till he has let himself out of prison, and then come and assist him. O no; Jehovah Himself must do the

deed; for the poor prisoner can only groan, sigh, and pray for deliverance, but cannot effect it. If David could have obtained liberty by his own exertions, why does he pray, “*Bring* my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name”? Observe the object of the poor prisoner in prayer to be brought out of prison; it is not merely ease and comfort to himself, but the glory of God: “that I may praise Thy name.” Thus, praise to the name of the Lord is the consequence of His delivering mercy to our souls; praise to sovereign love, atoning blood, and Almighty power, combined together, in bringing a soul out of prison.” From the Gospel Standard, 1838.
